A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
31 JULY 2026 | VOL.215 No.5 | £6.50 | €9.95

Southern Europe burns 15

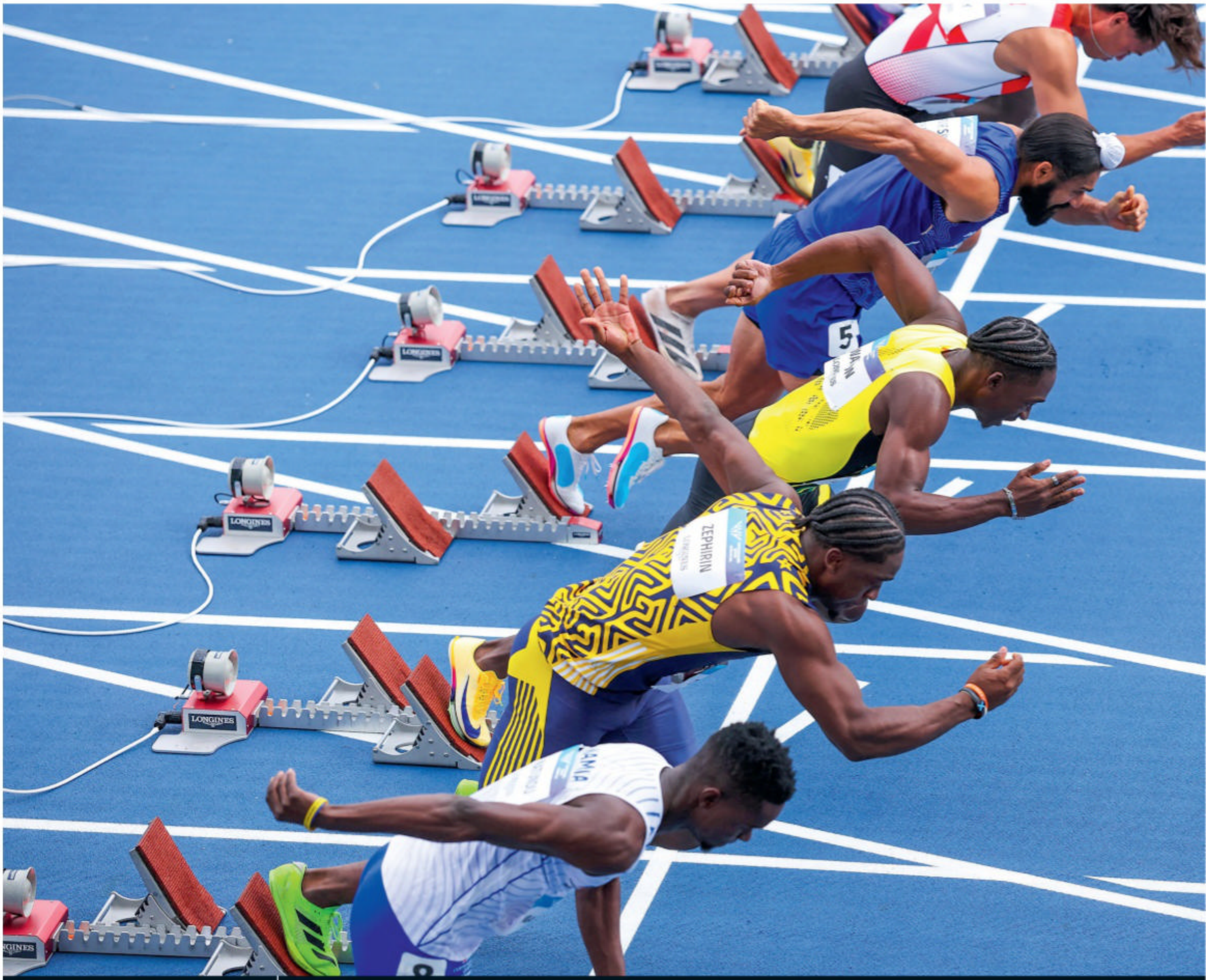
Hiroshima recalled 34

The Guardian Weekly

Bugs in the system

HOW INDIA'S COCKROACH MOVEMENT UNDERMINED MODI 10

9 770958 999992 31



Eyewitness
United Kingdom

PHOTOGRAPH:
PHIL NOBLE/REUTERS

Block party
Athletes including India's Gurindervir Singh, Jamaica's Rohan Watson and Markey Zephirin from the Turks and Caicos Islands make a quick start in an early heat of the men's 100m at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow. The games run to 2 August, with 74 nations participating.

The Guardian Weekly
Founded in Manchester, England
4 July 1919

Vol 215 | Issue №5

Guardian Weekly is an edited selection of some of the best journalism found in the Guardian's digital editions in the UK, US and Australia, and the Guardian newspaper in the UK. The weekly magazine has an international focus and four editions: global, Europe, Australia and North America. The Guardian was founded in 1821, and Guardian Weekly in 1919. We exist to hold power to account in the name of the public interest, to uphold liberal and progressive values, to fight for the common good, and to build hope. Our values, as laid out by editor CP Scott in 1921, are honesty, integrity, courage, fairness, and a sense of duty to the reader and the community. The Guardian is wholly owned by the Scott Trust, a body whose purpose is "to secure the financial and editorial independence of the Guardian in perpetuity". We have no proprietor or shareholders, and any profit made is re-invested in journalism.

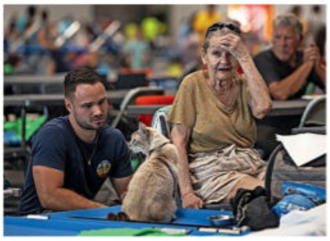
The Guardian Weekly

A week in the life of the world
31 JULY 2026

4
GLOBAL REPORT

Headlines from the last seven days

United Kingdom 8
Science & Environment 9
The big story
India Cockroach party's progress creeps up on Modi ..10



15
SPOTLIGHT

In-depth reporting and analysis

France
Inside the evacuation effort from Gironde's wildfires 15
Japan
Takaichi's economic vision: a triumph or a Truss moment? ..18
Palestine
Swimming classes offer respite to children of Gaza 20
Brazil
The Amazonian war against illegal gold mining 26
Science
Why a leading scientist thinks Nasa missed life on Mars...... 30
United States
Pentagon accused of cover-up over military casualties........32

34
FEATURES

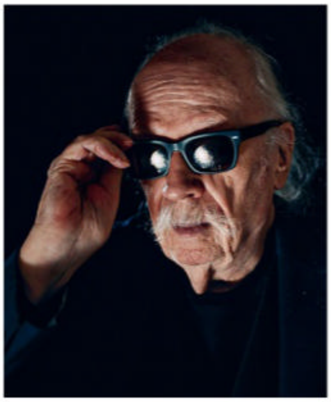
Long reads, interviews & essays

Hiroshima survivor Koko Kondo on horror, anger and forgiveness
By Simon Hattenstone.......... 34
Life in British coastal towns
By Lisa Bachelor and Polly Braden....................... 40

45
OPINION

▼ **Steve Bloomfield**
Trump has the international criminal court in his sights... 45
Coco Khan
A French chicken shop row is a problem for the left............47
Jonathan Freedland
Burnham's bus-fare policy is more than a gimmick 48

> *"This is an existential crisis not just for the international criminal court but for the idea of international justice*



51
CULTURE

TV, film, music, theatre, art, architecture & more

Film
King of horror John Carpenter on making movies his way ... 51
Music
Tribute acts steal the show and make gigs affordable again ...55
Architecture
Centenary celebrations for LA's dazzling art deco library 57
Books
Joy of the silver screen, 80s New York and radicalisation roots.. 58

60
LIFESTYLE

Tim Dowling
Our dog has a sheep phobia ..60
Kitchen aide
The science of pasta making ..61
Recipe
Pho now or pho later.............61

Join the community
Instagram: @guardian_weekly
facebook.com/guardianweekly

On the cover
A movement that began as a satirical protest when the chief justice of India compared the country's unemployed youth to cockroaches has cracked prime minister Narendra Modi's image as a "strongman" leader. But it's not just that the joke has "legs" and strong visuals; young people want a viable future and change.
Illustration: Pete Reynolds

SPOT ILLUSTRATIONS:
MATT BLEASE

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

GW

Copyright © 2026 GNM Ltd. All rights reserved

Published weekly by
*Guardian News & Media Ltd,
Kings Place,
90 York Way,
London, N1 9GU, UK*

Printed in the UK, Belgium, the US, Australia and New Zealand

ISSN 0958-9996

To advertise contact *advertising.enquiries@theguardian.com*

To subscribe, visit *theguardian.com/gw-subscribe*

Manage your subscription at *subscribe.theguardian.com/manage*

*USA and Canada
gwsubsus@theguardian.com
Toll Free:
+1-844-632-2010*

*Australia and New Zealand
apac.help@theguardian.com
Toll Free:
1 800 773 766*

*UK, Europe and Rest of World
gwsubs@theguardian.com
+44 (0) 330 333 6767*

1 US/IRAN

Failure of diplomatic efforts will lead to 'military action'

Donald Trump once again warned that the US would return to "strong military action" against Iran if diplomatic efforts do not bring a rapid resolution to the crisis in the Middle East.

"We are in very deep talks with Iran. If they don't work out, we will go back to very strong military action," the US president told Axios on Monday. Asked for how long he would allow the talks to proceed, he answered: "Not much time. Either it goes fast or not at all."

Earlier, Tehran said there were no direct talks with the US to end the conflict, which began in late February with a wave of US-Israeli strikes and has rocked the region and the global economy.

The diplomatic back and forth came as Oman and Iran drew closer to an agreement in principle on the future management of the strait of Hormuz, but remained unable to resolve Tehran's demand that all ships passing through the strategic waterway must pay some type of transit fee or toll to a consortium led by the two countries.

Oman and Iran met in Tehran for technical talks last weekend that may hold the key to preventing a further round of fighting.

2 US/CANADA

Trump blames neighbour for 'poisoning air'

Scientists reacted with incredulity after Donald Trump accused Canada of "poisoning" the US's air with smoke from a slew of forest fires and threatened sanctions.

The US president said that he raised the issue of smoke wafting into the US from nearly 1,000 Canadian wildfires with Mark Carney, the country's prime minister, at the World Cup final.

Trump, who has previously advocated the "raking" and "cleaning" of forests to prevent major conflagrations, last week announced 50% tariffs on Canada, a long-term US ally that he has previously threatened with annexation.

The US is being "unnecessarily invaded by filthy, polluted and unhealthy air", he claimed.

Spotlight *Page 15* →

3 UNITED STATES

Controversy over Pentagon Iran war casualties figures

The Pentagon quietly updated its official war casualty database over the weekend, adding more than 140 wounded service members. The figures showed that 18 US troops had been killed and 624 wounded since the US launched its war against Iran on 28 February.

A dispute over the figures has followed the resumption of near-daily airstrikes on Iran since 6 July. Analysts and officials have questioned whether casualties from the renewed fighting should be counted separately from the war's earlier phase, a move that would be unprecedented.

Spotlight *Page 32* →

4 INTERNATIONAL LAW

ICC top prosecutor removed over misconduct claims

Karim Khan, the prosecutor of the international criminal court, was removed from office after the court's governing body concluded in June that he had committed serious misconduct in connection to allegations of sexual abuse.

The ICC's member states voted to oust the British prosecutor in an unprecedented move that concludes a damaging episode for the court, two years after the allegations were first raised. The vote followed a drawn-out disciplinary process that examined the abuse allegations, which were made by a woman who worked for Khan at the ICC.

Khan has repeatedly denied all the allegations against him, which include claims that he engaged in coercive and non-consensual sexual behaviour. His lawyers criticised the disciplinary process as procedurally unfair.

Khan's decisions to obtain arrest warrants for the Russian president, Vladimir Putin and the Israeli prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, raised the ICC's profile and thrust it into the crosshairs of major powers.

Opinion *Page 45* →

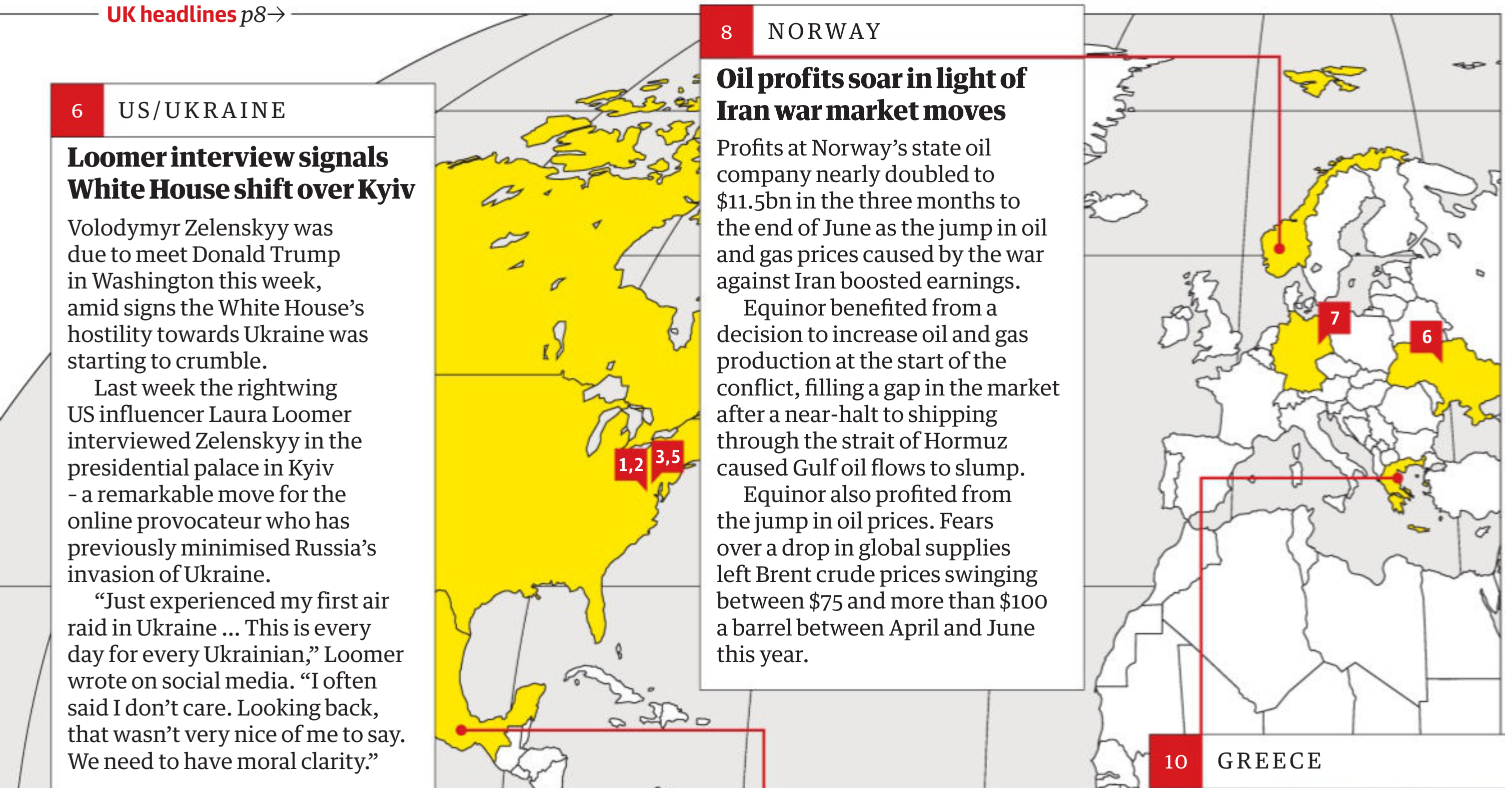
5 UNITED STATES

Trump imposes fresh tariffs on more than 80 countries

Donald Trump imposed new tariffs on more than 80 countries to replace a 10% global duty that was due to expire.

The president has imposed tariffs of between 10% and 12.5% on dozens of countries including the UK, Mexico, Canada, Australia, India, China and the 27 EU countries. The newest levies fall under section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, which is aimed against countries that engage in forced labour. It in effect replaces the blanket 10% tariff that Trump imposed in February, after the US supreme court declared many of his earlier tariffs were illegal.

UK headlines p8→



6 US/UKRAINE

Loomer interview signals White House shift over Kyiv

Volodymyr Zelenskyy was due to meet Donald Trump in Washington this week, amid signs the White House's hostility towards Ukraine was starting to crumble.

Last week the rightwing US influencer Laura Loomer interviewed Zelenskyy in the presidential palace in Kyiv - a remarkable move for the online provocateur who has previously minimised Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"Just experienced my first air raid in Ukraine … This is every day for every Ukrainian," Loomer wrote on social media. "I often said I don't care. Looking back, that wasn't very nice of me to say. We need to have moral clarity."

7 GERMANY

Police shoot suspect dead after Berlin Pride attack

A man suspected of driving a van into a crowd near Berlin's Pride festival then going on a knife rampage in an Islamist terror attack was shot dead by police last Sunday.

One woman was killed on Saturday evening and 29 others were injured after a man drove a rented minivan into a crowd, then attacked people with what appeared to be a machete in Tiergarten park near Berlin's Brandenburg Gate. The attack forced organisers to cut short one of Europe's largest Pride events and came as Germany remained on edge after a series of deadly vehicle and knife attacks.

8 NORWAY

Oil profits soar in light of Iran war market moves

Profits at Norway's state oil company nearly doubled to $11.5bn in the three months to the end of June as the jump in oil and gas prices caused by the war against Iran boosted earnings.

Equinor benefited from a decision to increase oil and gas production at the start of the conflict, filling a gap in the market after a near-halt to shipping through the strait of Hormuz caused Gulf oil flows to slump.

Equinor also profited from the jump in oil prices. Fears over a drop in global supplies left Brent crude prices swinging between $75 and more than $100 a barrel between April and June this year.

9 MEXICO

Mayor assassinated inside his own town hall

A mayor was shot dead in the state of Morelos after having survived a previous assassination attempt earlier this year. He was the 14th mayor to be murdered since Claudia Sheinbaum became president in October 2024.

Valentín Lavín Romero, from the Green party, an ally of the ruling leftwing Morena party, was killed in the town hall of Temoac, near Mexico City, by hitmen who then escaped on a motorbike.

Almost 100 mayors have been murdered in Mexico since 2006, when the then president, Felipe Calderón, deployed the military to take on Mexico's organised crime groups, ultimately causing drug-related violence to rise.

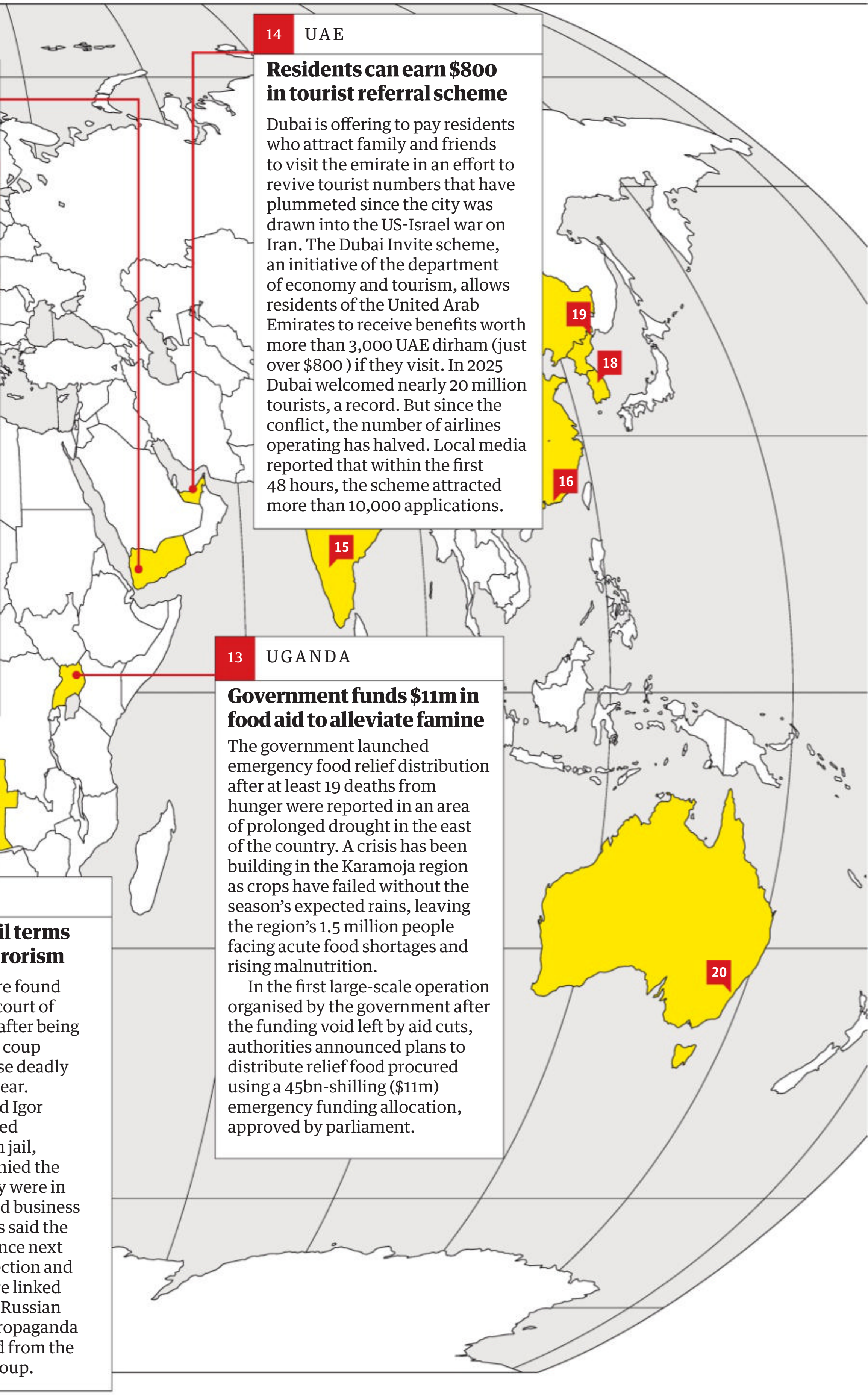
10 GREECE

Unesco pleases the gods with Mount Olympus listing

Mount Olympus, the mythical home of the ancient Greek gods, has been inducted into a hall of more modern fame as Unesco announced it would be added to its world heritage list.

Greece's highest mountain made the list alongside the second world war D-day landing beaches in northern France and the ancient Japanese capitals of Asuka and Fujiwara. South Sudan's Boma-Badingilo landscape, host to one of the world's largest land mammal migrations, also won a designation.

In the case of Olympus, which had been on a tentative list of sites since 2014, the news was met with near euphoria in Greece.



11 YEMEN

Houthis declare Red Sea blockade of Saudi shipping

The Iran-aligned Houthi movement, which controls northern and western Yemen, declared a naval blockade of Saudi Arabia in the Red Sea after the kingdom struck the airport in Sana'a. The Houthis struck two Saudi tankers in the Red Sea and a missile attack on the southern Saudi city of Jizan, including a refinery belonging to Aramco, the Saudi oil giant.

The naval blockade threatens global energy markets, as Saudi Arabia has been avoiding the closure of the strait by diverting oil to the Red Sea.

12 ANGOLA

Russians given jail terms for spying and terrorism

Two Russian men were found guilty by an Angolan court of terrorism and spying after being accused of planning a coup and helping to organise deadly demonstrations last year.

Lev Lakshtanov and Igor Ratchin were sentenced to eight and 11 years in jail, respectively. They denied the charges, claiming they were in Angola for cultural and business activities. Prosecutors said the men wanted to influence next year's presidential election and claimed that they were linked to Africa Politology, a Russian disinformation and propaganda network that emerged from the Wagner mercenary group.

13 UGANDA

Government funds $11m in food aid to alleviate famine

The government launched emergency food relief distribution after at least 19 deaths from hunger were reported in an area of prolonged drought in the east of the country. A crisis has been building in the Karamoja region as crops have failed without the season's expected rains, leaving the region's 1.5 million people facing acute food shortages and rising malnutrition.

In the first large-scale operation organised by the government after the funding void left by aid cuts, authorities announced plans to distribute relief food procured using a 45bn-shilling ($11m) emergency funding allocation, approved by parliament.

14 UAE

Residents can earn $800 in tourist referral scheme

Dubai is offering to pay residents who attract family and friends to visit the emirate in an effort to revive tourist numbers that have plummeted since the city was drawn into the US-Israel war on Iran. The Dubai Invite scheme, an initiative of the department of economy and tourism, allows residents of the United Arab Emirates to receive benefits worth more than 3,000 UAE dirham (just over $800) if they visit. In 2025 Dubai welcomed nearly 20 million tourists, a record. But since the conflict, the number of airlines operating has halved. Local media reported that within the first 48 hours, the scheme attracted more than 10,000 applications.

The big story p10 →

15 INDIA

Cockroach group accuses government of more arrests

The youth-led "cockroach" movement, whose protests forced the resignation of the education minister, accused the government of backtracking on its promise not to act against student protesters.

The Cockroach Janta party (CJP), which organised protests over exam paper leaks, had agreed to call off the demonstrations last Saturday after the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, resigned and senior BJP ministers assured the group no punitive action would be taken against protesters. But on Monday, the CJP accused the Modi government of detaining hundreds of students.

On Monday, Neha Bora, head of the All India Students Association, travelled to Bihar to put pressure on the authorities.

The big story *Page 10* →

16 CHINA

Typhoon Noul forces more than 715,000 from homes

Typhoon Noul, which made landfall last Sunday, prompted the evacuation of more than 715,000 people in Guangdong province with the region on high alert and hundreds of flights cancelled.

The typhoon - the strongest to make landfall in China so far this year - was expected to dump torrential rain across much of southern China this week, authorities said, after sweeping the province of Guangdong and neighbouring Hong Kong with gale-force winds.

China declared its highest alert for flash floods in several provinces.

17 POVERTY

Healthy diet too expensive for one in three, UN warns

One in three people cannot afford to eat a healthy diet, a UN report found, prompting calls for action on food affordability.

There are 2.69 billion people unable to afford a diverse diet that meets their energy and nutrient needs, and it will take "immense" amounts of work to achieve the global target of zero hunger by 2030, the annual report from five UN agencies warns.

Global hunger declined for a third consecutive year in 2025, with 7.8% of people affected, down from 8.1% in 2024. However, the proportion of people who cannot afford a healthy diet remains "extremely high", said Máximo Torero, chief economist of the Food and Agriculture Organization, one of the authors.

The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2026 report calculated the cost of a healthy diet is 4.28 purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars a day. This means that in any country, a healthy diet costs the amount of local currency with the same buying power that $4.28 has in the US.

"The extreme poverty line is $3PPP per person," Torero said.

18 SOUTH KOREA

Restaurant owner faces jail for serving ants on a dessert

Prosecutors asked a court to sentence the owner of a Michelin-starred restaurant to one year in prison for serving a dessert topped with ants, an insect not approved for consumption under local food safety law. The request also sought a 20m won ($13,680) fine for the company that runs the restaurant, Yonhap news agency reported.

The restaurant's owner and the company were indicted on charges of violating the country's food sanitation act. The ministry of food and drug safety launched its investigation after spotting mentions of the ant dishes in blog posts and social media.

19 NORTH KOREA

First ever road link to Russia near completion

The first road link ever built between Russia and North Korea is close to completion, amid concerns it is being built to boost military cooperation in the Ukraine war.

The bridge spans the Tumen River, between Tumangang in North Korea and Khasan in Russia's far east. North Korea finished its side of the project ahead of a planned opening on 19 June, but Russia has fallen behind and no new opening date has been confirmed.

Russian and North Korean authorities say the project is intended to expand trade and tourism. However, a new investigation by a Ukrainian human rights group suggests it is intended to provide a discreet military logistics corridor.

20 AUSTRALIA

Qantas nonstop test flight covers 17,000km in 19 hours

Qantas's new ultra long-distance aircraft landed on Australian soil after a 19-hour test flight from France. The Airbus A350-1000ULR, designed for Qantas to complete some of the longest commercial flights in the world, set off on a nonstop journey from the Airbus manufacturing facility Toulouse, France, last Thursday, destined for Melbourne. The planes have been designed to fly up to 22 hours nonstop on the Sydney to London route, expected to start in October 2027.

More than 67,000 enthusiasts following the almost 17,000km route on flightradar24.com.

DEATHS

Bill Oddie
British naturalist and broadcaster, who came to fame on the TV comedy show The Goodies. He died on 25 July, aged 85.

Betye Saar
Pioneering figure of the US Black arts movement. She died on 26 July, aged 99.

James Woolsey
American lawyer and CIA director under Bill Clinton. He died on 21 July, aged 84.

Gunther von Hagens
German anatomist whose Body Worlds exhibitions showcased his "plastination" method of preserving body tissue. He died on 24 July, aged 81.

Luiz Carlos Barreto
Brazilian film producer who was a driving force in the Cinema Novo movement in the 1960s and 1970s. He died on 22 July, aged 98.

Kaylee Hottle
American actress known for her roles in Godzilla vs. Kong and Godzilla x Kong. She died in a car accident on 21 July, aged 18.

Against the tide *p40*→

30m

The number of extra pints of beer sold by UK pubs during the football World Cup compared with a normal trading period, delivering £150m ($200m) in added sales, according to the British Beer & Pub Association

LABOUR

Burnham pledges to fix 'crumbling' social care

Andy Burnham promised to use "whatever political capital I have" to finally fix the crumbling social care system in England, saying that without rapid action the NHS could effectively collapse.

In his first full interview since becoming prime minister last week, Burnham said he could not put a timetable on the arrival of a new system for social care.

Burnham has repeatedly said he hopes to properly tackle a political issue that has been repeatedly neglected, highlighting personal experience with his father, who has Alzheimer's disease and requires care. He told the BBC he would go as quickly as he could on its "reform".

"I think there are major changes you can make before the next election. This costs the NHS billions of pounds, and we will never get the NHS back to good waiting time standards until we fix social care," he said.

He said: "Whatever political capital I have, I will put into fixing broken social care, and I would not want to leave office without having brought in the substantial change, the new system of social care that you described.

"I can't put a timeline on it right here, right now. If we don't do it, the NHS will collapse under the weight of trying to care for people who've not really needed to end up in the NHS system."

Burnham also said the UK had to "get really serious" about reducing the amount spent on social security and other benefits. However, he added that he did not want to demonise people who claimed social security.

Opinion *Page 48* →

SCIENCE

Jodrell Bank facing closure after funder cuts support

Jodrell Bank Observatory, which runs a world-leading network of radio telescopes in Cheshire, north-west England, is facing closure after its major funder cut support for the facility.

The deep space observatory, which hosts the Grade I-listed Lovell telescope, is prized by astronomers. Its funder, UK Research and Innovation (UKRI), said on Monday it would withdraw funding for the e-Merlin network when the current agreement lapses in March 2028.

The UKRI has an annual budget of nearly £10bn ($13bn), but the Science and Technology Facilities Council (STFC) needs to make cuts. The move threatens 28 jobs and will affect 3,000 researchers who work with the facility.

CULTURE

Charli xcx added to National Portrait Gallery collection

A portrait of Charli xcx has been added to the National Portrait Gallery's collection in the week when she hopes for a No 1 chart position for her new album Music, Fashion, Film.

The photograph by Harley Weir was taken in 2023 and became associated with the singer's Brat era - the 2024 album that became a pop culture phenomenon.

Brandei Estes, the National Portrait Gallery's senior curator of photographs, said Charli is "one of the defining cultural figures of her generation" and that Weir "has a distinctive photographic language that combines intimacy with a powerful sense of presence".

CLIMATE

Drought declared in Wales in driest July for 200 years

Parts of Wales are now in drought, with this month on course to be the driest on record for nearly 200 years.

Natural Resources Wales said last week that record-low river flows, back-to-back heatwaves and widespread wildfires have prompted the declaration of drought status in north Wales and the Upper Severn.

Spotlight *Page 15* →

ENERGY

North Sea oil drilling delayed after rig accident

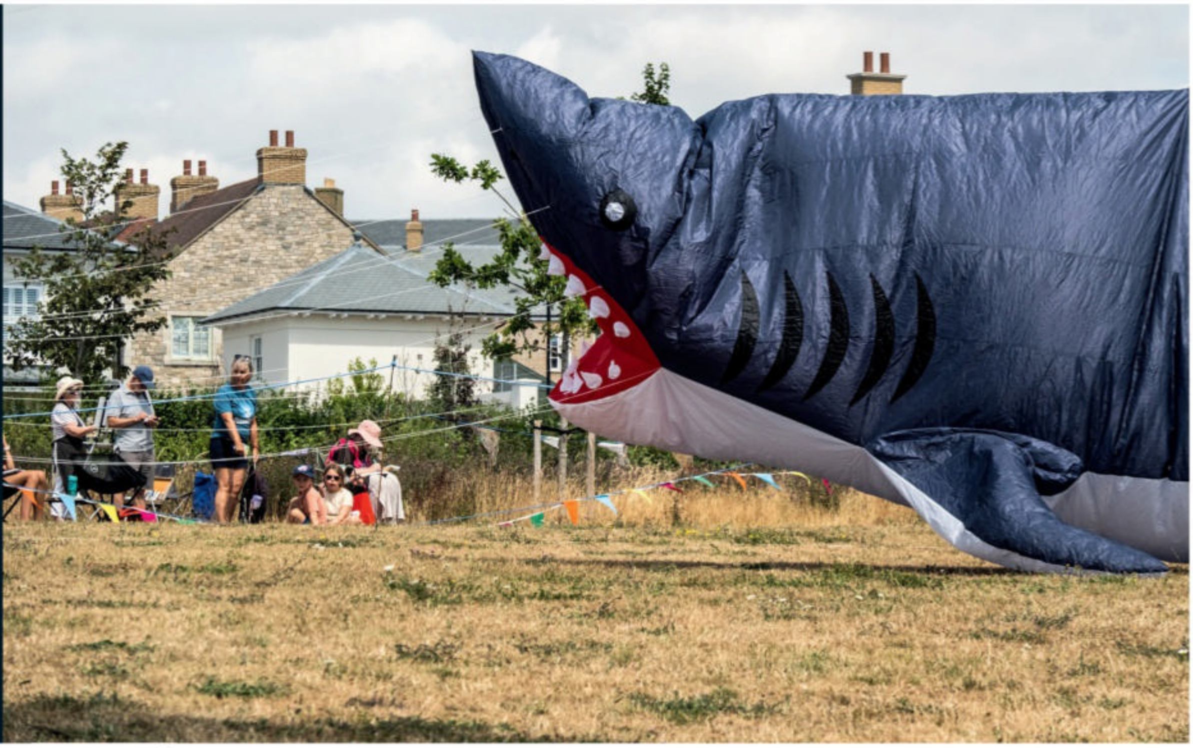
Production at Britain's biggest undeveloped oil and gas field could be delayed for months after equipment from a rig was accidentally dropped in the North Sea.

Andy Burnham's government is under pressure from the fossil fuel industry to allow oil to be retrieved from the Rosebank site despite opposition from climate campaigners and some MPs.

Rosebank was believed to be ready to generate oil before the end of the year, pending ministerial approval. Adura, the company responsible for Rosebank, now says it anticipates this will happen at some point in 2027. The field is projected to produce 300m barrels of oil over its 25-year lifespan.

However, preparations for oil production at Rosebank have been hindered by the incident, which occurred on 18 April. Two central pieces of drilling equipment were dropped 1,100 metres on to the seabed. No workers were hurt.

Do you have a recently taken picture you'd like to share with Guardian Weekly? Scan the QR code or visit theguardian.com/pictures-guardian-weekly and we'll print your best submissions



Eyewitness

Once bitten

A giant inflatable shark approaches kite enthusiasts at Let's Go Fly, a new festival in Poundbury, south-west England. Thousands of visitors were offered a chance to see the skills of professional flyers, well as fly or make their own kites.

TOM CORBAN/SHUTTERSTOCK

SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT

AGEING

Restricted eating times 'may reduce cognitive decline'

Confining mealtimes and snacks to a nine-hour window and avoiding food for four hours before bed may help stave off cognitive decline in older age, researchers at Rutgers University in New Jersey, US say.

A pilot study of older women living with overweight or obesity found hints of improvement in mental skills among those who ate within the restricted period compared with those who spread their meals over a longer time. The finding is preliminary and subject to confirmation in larger studies.

Dementia is the leading cause of death in the UK and the seventh worldwide, leading to nearly 2 million deaths globally each year. Some risk factors are unavoidable, such as age and genetics, but experts believe nearly half of cases could be prevented or delayed through changes to lifestyle. Obesity in middle age can raise the risk of dementia in later life by 30%.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Bacterial resistance to drugs puts children at growing risk

Life-saving drugs used to treat common childhood infections are increasingly failing and the resistance of bacteria to these medicines will worsen over the next decade, a global analysis has found.

Led by Murdoch Children's Research Institute (MCRI) in collaboration with the University of Sydney in Australia, researchers analysed samples from children across 82 countries. They found antibiotic resistance increased in every region between 2004 and 2022. Babies and children in intensive care and countries with fewer healthcare resources are most affected, according to the findings published in the Journal of the American Medical Association.

SPACE

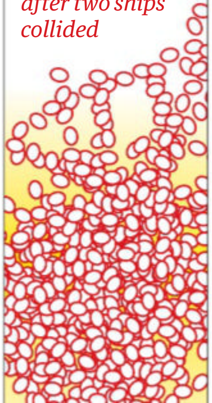
Milky Way flipped in collision with galaxy 10bn years ago

Astronomers have found evidence that the Milky Way was flipped on its side after a direct hit from a wayward galaxy long before the solar system was born. The cataclysmic collision took place about 10bn years ago, when the Milky Way was struck head on by an incoming dwarf galaxy known as the Gaia Sausage.

The Milky Way tore the interloper to shreds and absorbed its stars, but the chaos unleashed probably flipped the entire disc of the Milky Way by more than 90 degrees into the position seen today, astronomers at Durham University said. The details were presented at a Royal Astronomical Society meeting.

1bn

The number of nurdles – 1mm-5mm plastic pellets – that spilled into the River Tyne in north-east England after two ships collided



MARINE LIFE

Orcas seen at play as they ram prey so hard it explodes

Orcas have been observed ramming into giant fish so hard that the prey explodes, possibly as a form of gory entertainment. On several occasions, orcas were observed to hold sunfish in their jaws while a second whale smashed into the target at high speed, causing it to break into thousands of pieces. As the fish had already been killed, scientists suggested the behaviour may represent a form of play.

The findings are reported in the journal Frontiers in Ethology.

PROTEST

The cockroach movement has gripped India and rattled rightwing PM Narendra Modi, forcing one of his key government allies to resign. Could it now go further?

By *Hannah Ellis-Petersen* DELHI

Even the night before Narendra Modi accepted the resignation of his education minister, India's prime minister appeared confident that the largest mass uprising to take place in his 12 years in power would do little to rattle his government.

Addressing his "young friends" in a late-night Instagram selfie reel last Friday, he thanked the people - who were mobilised en masse across the country, shouting anti-government slogans - for their "thoughtful suggestions".

Less than 24 hours later, Modi, who has fiercely cultivated his strongman image for years, had bowed to public pressure and accepted the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan. It was, say analysts, the remarkable humbling of a government that has ruled with almost untouchable impunity since 2014.

Over that week, a gen Z movement that called itself the Cockroach Janta party (CJP) had mobilised unprecedented protests in the name of justice for millions of young people after the leaking of a medical exam paper forced 2 million students to resit the test and was blamed for more than a dozen suicides.

The resignation of Pradhan, Modi's loyal political ally, remained their first and foremost demand for accountability, even as the protests expanded into a wider fight for democracy. Yet Pradhan went unmentioned by Modi in his Instagram address.

Last Saturday morning, more people than ever were pouring into Delhi's historic Jantar Mantar site - the centre of the protests - and unrest was spreading fast to other cities, including states ruled by Modi's Bharatiya Janata party (BJP).

It was not only physical space that had been captured by the cockroach movement. Since coming to power, the BJP has proved enormously effective at capturing the online narrative, deploying its powerful, highly organised IT cell to mobilise and attack any perceived criticism of the government, whether it came from citizens, politicians or journalists.

But this proved no match for the millions of gen Z memes and reels that began to flood Instagram during the week, fearlessly insulting Modi and pillorying the government, each more creative and incendiary than the next. Modi's last-ditch attempts to speak directly to the youth on Instagram were met with more ridicule and spin-off memes.

Modi had also lost another medium critical to the BJP's domination of the national narrative - the mainstream TV news channels widely acknowledged to have been co-opted by the government over the past 12 years and turned into mouthpieces for its rightwing Hindu nationalist ideology.

Initially the channels ignored the protests, and when they did cover them it was to suggest the protesters were being bankrolled by sinister foreign forces and Pakistani terror groups. In response, the protesters turned on the channels, using

→

Millions of gen Z memes and reels flooded Instagram insulting Modi

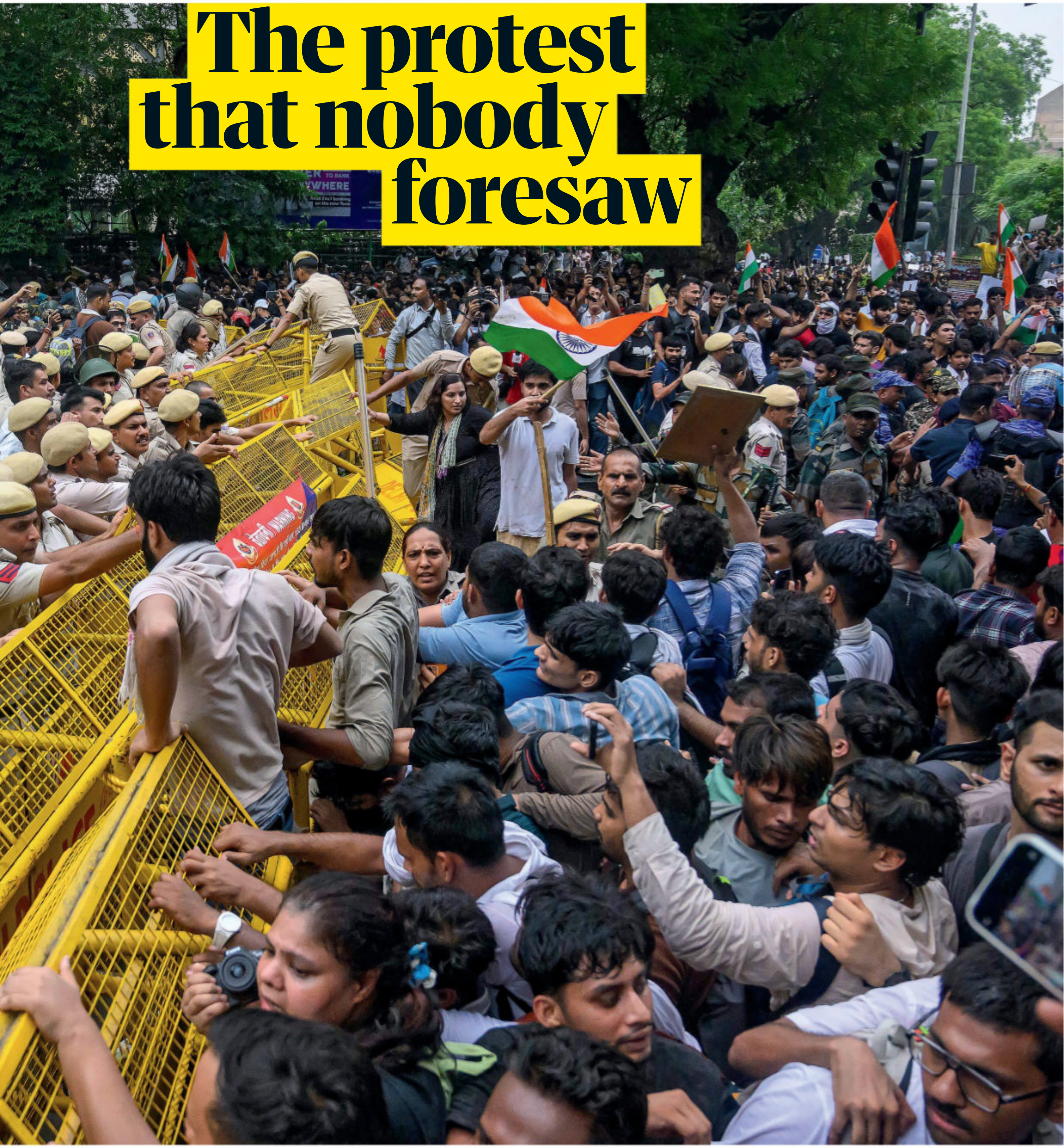
Strength in numbers
Cockroach party's rise *Page 13* →

Mukul Kesavan
The Mamdani effect *Page 13* →

Delhi police barricade off Cockroach Janta party protesters on 20 July

ANKIT ROY MAJUMDER/ZUMA/SHUTTERSTOCK

The protest that nobody foresaw



▲ Life resumes near Delhi protest site Jantar Mantar last Sunday
RITESH SHUKLA/GETTY

social media to expose their "lies". When the protests escalated, Modi remained conspicuously absent from the airwaves.

Pradhan's resignation came as it appeared that all other options for the government had gone. The option of a ruthless crackdown appeared untenable given the mass outcry to the police violence that had hit protesters last Monday.

"The online space was totally conquered by the protesters, and regime-loving media was seriously delegitimised," said Ashutosh Varshney, a professor of international studies at Brown University in Rhode Island. "The anger was so comprehensive that there was no option left but for Pradhan to go."

But this was more than the loss of a minister, Varshney said – it was also the first time in 12 years that the Modi government had lost control of the political narrative. "This is a repressive government," he said. "It wants obedience, it wants no critical discussion and it generates fear. But now the climate of fear has collapsed."

Analysts say the resignation of Pradhan could also have implications for Modi's power over his own cabinet. Pradhan was one of Modi's most loyal ministers and ideological foot soldiers, and had implemented policies exactly as senior party figures had wanted. He had also helped the BJP win Odisha state for the first time in the general election, bringing in crucial seats.

Leaders insist this is just the beginning, particularly for education reform

"Modi knows that once you start firing your most loyal ministers, it sets up the incentives for defections in other ministers as well," said the political columnist Pratap Bhanu Mehta. "If your own cabinet starts to hedge for a future where they may not be backed by your own government, that's when you are in trouble."

Prior to last week's unrest, Modi had been riding high on a string of important state electoral victories, in particular the BJP's first triumph in West Bengal, a politically important state that had long pushed back against Hindu nationalist politics.

The BJP appeared to have fully bounced back from the blow taken in the 2024 elections, when the party failed to win an outright parliamentary majority and had to scramble together a large enough alliance to take power. At the same time, the much-beleaguered opposition had continued to lose countless state elections, and their allegations of voting impropriety by the BJP fell mostly on deaf ears.

Yet the emergence of the cockroaches has reinvigorated not only India's youth but its political opposition parties as well. Jumping on the bandwagon, the opposition Congress party had its best week in years as it mobilised protests and shut down parliament. The party's leader, Rahul Gandhi, was dramatically dragged away by police outside Modi's house for supporting students.

New dawn
A wake-up call for Modi

12
The number of years that Narendra Modi has been in power. This is the largest uprising he has faced in that time

2m
The number of students who were forced to resit a medical exam after the test was leaked

Analysts say dissent, which had been systematically crushed over the past 12 years, has now been regalvanised as an effective tool to hold the government to account.

"After a long time, there's an assertion of political agency across different sections of society," said Mehta. "And the minute you see that agency out in the street, it empowers lots of other agents."

The next big test of the electoral implications of the CJP movement will come early next year, when India's largest and most politically important state holds its state elections. Holding on to power in Uttar Pradesh, the BJP's political heartland, is seen as crucial for the party and would have major implications for the next general election in 2029.

The grievances of India's newly politicised youth are extensive, including a chronic lack of graduate jobs and stagnant wages.

Just how the CJP intends to politically mobilise after its striking victory last Saturday remains to be seen. Leaders and supporters insist this is just the "beginning", particularly in their push for education reform. Their founder, Abhijeet Dipke, has some experience as a political party organiser but has not made his own ambitions known.

Yet analysts said that one of the most crucial impacts of the CJP had been to reopen a rapidly closing democratic space and make it seem possible that a new kind of political opposition could emerge, one reflective of the voices heard on the streets of India last week.

Saurav Das, a CJP spokesperson, said it was encouraging people involved in the movement to go into politics. "This is one of our goals," he said. "We need to increase youth participation in politics, because right now it's controlled by uncles and aunties who are only interested in looking after their own lifestyles and don't understand the needs of our generation. The answer also has to be political."

HANNAH ELLIS-PETERSEN IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTH ASIA CORRESPONDENT

Critical mass
Behind the rise of the Cockroach Janta party

By *Hannah Ellis-Petersen* DELHI

How did the Cockroach Janta party emerge?
The Cockroach Janta party (CJP) might have started out as an online joke, but driven by millions of discontented young people, it has swiftly grown into an unexpected challenge to the powerful rightwing government of Narendra Modi.

The CJP was founded in May by Abhijeet Dipke, 30, who last year graduated from university in the US. Enraged to hear the chief justice of India comparing unemployed youth to "parasites" and "cockroaches", Dipke jokingly put out a call on social media: "What if all cockroaches came together?"

The response was overwhelming. Dipke built a website and social media accounts for a satirical Cockroach Janta party - a poke at Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata party (BJP) - with a biting manifesto taking aim at the government. In two weeks, the CJP's Instagram page had more than 22 million followers, overtaking the BJP's.

What are the causes championed by the CJP?
Dipke focused the movement on leaks of medical entrance exams - known by the acronym Neet - which have repeatedly been sold to the highest bidder. The pressure to succeed is high: more than 2 million students compete for just 130,000 places. A string of exam leaks has forced millions of students into retakes and were linked to dozens of suicides in recent years. Other papers have also been leaked.

The CJP called for the government to be held accountable for exam leaks and for the education minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, to resign.

For many of India's gen Zs and millennials, the CJP has also given voice to wider frustrations over an education system in crisis and a job market that, according to one study, has left 40% of India's graduates below the age of 25 unemployed.

When did the CJP hit the streets?
The first offline protest took place in Delhi in early June. Dipke returned from the US to lead the demonstration, first in Delhi then across the country.

At a second protest in Delhi, they pledged not to move until Pradhan was gone. The protesters were joined by Sonam Wangchuk, an engineer and education activist who was last year arrested and detained under terror laws for his activism. He announced he would embark on a Gandhian hunger strike in solidarity with the students until the education minister stepped down. Twenty days into Wangchuk's hunger strike, Delhi police sparked outrage after they forcibly removed Wangchuk to a government hospital.

How did his protest end?
Last Friday, after 26 days, Wangchuk posted that he had ended the hunger strike. In a video from his hospital bed, he said he had been promised that India's parliament would take up the issue of accountability in the examination system.

CJP leaders said the government had agreed to meet them to discuss their demands. A day after the meeting, Pradhan stepped down.

▲ Activist Sonam Wangchuk, left, went on a 26-day hunger strike

▼ CJP leaders Saurav Das, left, and Abhijeet Dipke

RAJAT GUPTA/EPA

COMMENTARY
INDIA

The Mamdani effect
A huge victory - and a sign of headaches to come for Modi

By *Mukul Kesavan*

The rebellion in India of the young, led by the Cockroach Janta party (CJP), unfolded against a backdrop of large abstract geometrical structures - arcs, planes, hemispheres - that together make up an observatory called Jantar Mantar, built in the early 18th century to refine almanacs and tell time. Jantar Mantar has been a byword for political protest for decades: it marks the space that the Delhi police assigns to the politically disgruntled so they can vent in a contained way. But it had never before hosted a political insurgency that started from scratch and forced the Indian state to back down in less than eight weeks.

When its founder, Abhijeet Dipke, brought the CJP to Jantar Mantar, it was a social media hashtag with 20 million followers. While he was studying in Boston, Dipke took the remarks of chief justice Surya Kant, who is accused of referring to the swathes of unemployed young people and activists as "parasites" and "cockroaches", and turned them into a here-we-come meme. When he brought the CJP home to Delhi on 6 June to make it real, people were intrigued. Given the mostly dismal fate of civil society movements during prime minister Narendra Modi's time in office, no one anticipated the David and Goliath contest that came to a head last Saturday.

▼ Cockroach Janta party supporters gather in Mumbai

DIVYAKANT SOLANKI/EPA

Like other political tourists, I visited Jantar Mantar on 6 June out of curiosity. On that inaugural day it was modestly crowded and not that different from the dozens of demos I had attended over 50 years. The one difference was how young these so-called cockroaches were. I had seen young people mobilise against Modi's government at close quarters before, when the students of Jamia Millia Islamia, the university I taught in, came out against a pernicious citizenship bill. Their courage and idealism was defeated by a combination of police repression and organised rioting. This government's willingness to use police brutality, vigilante violence and a pliant judiciary to snuff out protest hung over the fledgling CJP campaign like a shadow.

But when I returned a month and a half later, on 20 July, the scheduled day for the march to parliament, Jantar Mantar was unrecognisable. A hunger strike had raised the political temperature of the protest. The government had forcibly removed the main hunger striker, Sonam Wangchuk, from the site and detained him in a hospital. The calculation was that his absence would defuse the tension and demoralise the protesters. That didn't happen. There were tens of thousands of people crammed into the barricaded space and thousands of police officers in attendance. The government had underestimated the size of the crowd that poured in by bus, train and car from Delhi and beyond. In the afternoon the Delhi police force and its masters compounded its miscalculation by attacking this giant gathering of young people with *lathis* (bamboo sticks) and teargas.

This tableau of brutality was shocking enough in real life, but in the hands of young digital natives, whose phone cameras were extensions of themselves, it became a gush of online content that brought the violent drama of this confrontation into every home. The callous violence of the police and the raging, mocking, laughing defiance of the young protesters played out on every mobile phone.

The cockroaches won where other protesters had lost. They won in part because they weren't visibly Muslim. There were Muslims among them, but this was a protest about the corruption of competitive examinations, an issue that concerns every middle-class family in India. It couldn't easily be tarred as an anti-national conspiracy in the way that the struggle for secular citizenship led by Jamia's mainly Muslim students was. This didn't stop India's mostly tame mainstream media from trying, but the scandal of the medical school examination was so egregious that no one gave them a hearing.

Also this was in the heart of New Delhi, a stone's throw from parliament. Once the government had made, from its point of view, the cardinal error of letting gen Z occupy the commanding heights of the capital, every day of the protest produced hundreds of new episodes of a national drama - a digital Mahabharat - in which the vulnerable and charismatic children of light faced off against the armed and uniformed enforcers of darkness. Bharatiya Janata party governments have sanctioned massive police violence against minorities in India's borderlands, in Manipur, Assam and Kashmir. But this was Jantar Mantar, the sacred centre of the republic.

The leaders of the movement, Dipke and Saurav Das, had set themselves up for success by demanding a difficult but doable concession: the sacking of the education minister. It was difficult because Modi had never dismissed a cabinet minister in response to political pressure - this stubbornness was central to his strongman persona. It was doable because there were precedents in the history of the republic for a minister taking responsibility for a disaster and resigning.

Modi did everything he could to wriggle out of this standoff. He even produced a comically inept Instagram video promising fast-track courts to address the corruption in the examination system. When that didn't work, his government capitulated and Dharmendra Pradhan, the education minister, departed. There was an assembly election scheduled in Uttar Pradesh next year, and Modi knew that the BJP would haemorrhage political support if the Jantar Mantar impasse wasn't resolved.

The quarrel that some commentators on the left have with the CJP is that Pradhan's dismissal was a symbolic victory but not a substantial one. Pralhad Joshi, the man who has replaced Pradhan as education minister, is not an improvement. Like Pradhan, he is a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the BJP's far-right parent body. He defended the premature release in 2022 of 11 men convicted for rape in the notorious Bilkis Bano gang-rape case. The CJP's argument is that Pradhan was always a proxy for Modi. The point of the protest was to diminish Modi by forcing him to back down publicly. Also it isn't clear what a systemic victory would look like or how it would be achieved.

The striking thing about the CJP's leadership is its youth and poise. Zohran Mamdani, the youthful mayor of New York, now seems a template. He is 35. Dipke, the CJP's Dalit leader, is 30 years old. Ashutosh Ranka, who negotiated the end of the protest with the BJP's leadership, is about the same age. Das, the other negotiator and spokesperson, is all of 26. Neha Bora, the president of a leftwing student organisation, the All-India Students' Association, is 25.

What they have in common is eloquence, message discipline, all-round unflappability and the potential to leave a legacy. They may be an enduring problem for this government. Jantar Mantar may have just produced an echelon of homegrown Mamdanis.

MUKUL KESAVAN IS AN AUTHOR BASED IN DELHI

> **“*In the hands of digital natives with phone cameras, brutality became a gush of online content***

ETHIOPIA

A migration model for others to follow

Page 24 →

Spotlight

FRANCE

'A disaster' The race to escape Gironde's wildfires

By *Angelique Chrisafis* BORDEAUX

Sitting in their suburban apartment in Mérignac on the outskirts of Bordeaux, Krishma, an interpreter, and her husband, Nassir, first felt a sense of dread when a black cloud turned the sky dark in the middle of the day. Then a bitter burning smell filled the air outside.

"The sky changed colour. It seemed like a cloud but it was smoke covering the sun - it wasn't a natural phenomenon. It didn't seem real," said Nassir, an English literature graduate from Kabul who has been living in France for seven years. "We couldn't breathe easily. You could feel it in your lungs."

The acrid smell, which at first seemed like burning rubber then unmistakably like wood smoke, was blowing on the wind from the massive wildfire in Gironde in south-western France. The blaze has torn through more than42,000 hectares, an area four times the size of Paris, causing one of the biggest devastations of land in France since the second world war. The government said on Monday that although the fire had stopped growing, it was still blazing and a new heatwave this week could make it harder to fight.

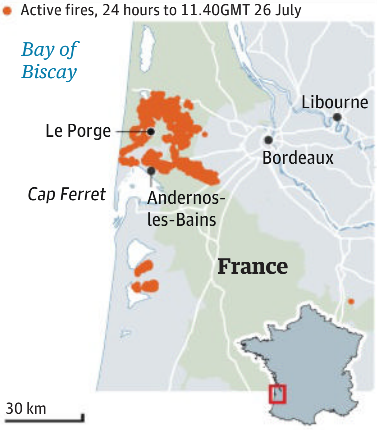
As authorities carried out one of the biggest evacuations in modern

▲ A firefighter tackles a blaze in Arès, near Cap Ferret, as efforts to contain the Gironde wildfire in south-western France continue

DAMIEN REMBERT/EPA

Continued →

France ablaze
Wildfires rage through Gironde



▲▲ A drone view of an area burned by the wildfire in the village of Le Porge, Gironde

MANON CRUZ/REUTERS

▲ Nassir and Krishma, pictured at the Bordeaux exhibition centre, said the fire 'didn't seen real'

ANGELIQUE CHRISAFIS

French history, Krishma and Nassir were among 220,000 people ordered to flee their homes in Gironde. Many were evacuated from wooded areas directly hit by fire, where at least 240 homes were destroyed. But tens of thousands more people were ordered by police to evacuate from more built-up urban streets as the fire reached 15km from the outer edge of Bordeaux's suburbs.

Krishma and Nassir had to evacuate their suburban street at midnight on Friday. With their two children aged 10 and 8, they quickly packed toothbrushes, toys, a change of clothes and personal documents into their car. On Monday afternoon, they were sitting on camp beds amid hundreds of people in a hangar at Bordeaux's exhibition centre. They had slept there for three nights and did not know when they would be allowed home. The fire did not reach their residential area, but with the French government warning the blaze was "extremely intense and unpredictable", authorities would not yet allow a return, they said.

Krishma added: "When we were in Afghanistan there were lots of explosions, suicide attacks … When we came here, we never thought there would be a situation like this."

Across the vast hangar, Yves, who used to work on road maintenance in Bordeaux, was sitting with his 13-year-old mastiff dog, Ichka. Yves fled his house in Le Haillan outside Bordeaux with his dog's bed under one arm and had carefully laid it out next to his camp bed. He was ordered to evacuate in the early hours of Saturday morning.

"We had to leave because of the smoke," he said. His wife, an administrator who did not want to be named, said she still felt shaken. "It was terrifying – you would look up at the sky and it was completely orange, even after nightfall. It was bizarre. The fire was causing that, and it really made you anxious … Seeing all that is beautiful in nature just go up in smoke is extremely painful and sad."

Others who had fled slept in their cars. Loïc, 66, a widower who had worked in the metals and glass industries before becoming a decorator, had to evacuate his house in Saint-Jean-d'Illac outside Bordeaux. "I had been watching this strange fog in the sky. It was a darkness almost like an eclipse," he said. "There was a kind of ochre mist as light from the sun was diffused through falling ash. So much ash was falling that my car was turned completely grey."

At 1am on Saturday, Loïc was woken by banging on the door from his neighbour, a fire officer, saying he had to leave immediately. He grabbed only his wallet and car keys, and there were so many people on the road and heading to the evacuation centre that he decided to stop elsewhere and get a bit of sleep in his car.

When he woke on Saturday, he knew he could not go home and headed instead for central Bordeaux, thinking the cinema would be a safe and comfortable place. "I watched the two-part Charles de Gaulle epic – the wrong way round, with the second film first, but I knew the story already – then I watched The Odyssey. Then I went back to sleep in my car."

The next day, he visited his wife's grave. On Monday morning, he arrived at the Bordeaux evacuation centre.

Florence, a former teaching assistant in a primary school, sat on a camp bed with her two cats in their travelling cases after having to evacuate Le Haillan. "I was distraught," she said. "I'm asthmatic. I put tape around the windows of my apartment but I could still smell the smoke seeping in under my front door, so I put down wet rags."

She said having to suddenly evacuate knowing a fire was raging in Gironde felt like something out of a war. "It felt like being in a disaster movie," she said.

ANGELIQUE CHRISAFIS IS THE GUARDIAN'S PARIS CORRESPONDENT

SPAIN/FRANCE

Fires could burn until late into year, warn EU officials

By *Angelique Chrisafis*
BORDEAUX
Angela Giuffrida
ROME and
Jennifer Rankin
BRUSSELS

▼ Smoke rises from a wildfire near San Martín de Valdeiglesias, west of Madrid
ANA BELTRÁN/REUTERS

EU officials have said wildfires could still be burning until early November in what threatens to be a record-breaking year for the area of land burned.

A fire in the hilly terrain of Ávila, west of Madrid, has become Spain's largest on record, burning 50,000 hectares. Authorities were this week battling two separate fires northwest of Madrid, taking the total area of scorched land near the capital to 70,000 hectares.

Spain's state meteorological agency, Aemet, said the heatwave would last until "at least" the end of this week, "making firefighting efforts more difficult due to high temperatures [and] locally gusty southerly winds".

In France, on a visit to Bordeaux, the French president, Emmanuel Macron, said: "The coming weeks will be tough and we have to hold out." But he said a smaller fire in the adjoining Landes – which forced the evacuation of more than 30,000 people – was "contained".

Speaking after an emergency meeting of the French government on Monday, the interior minister, Laurent Nuñez, described this year's wildfires as "completely exceptional". More than 116,000 hectares of forest and vegetation have been burned since January, far exceeding the 70,000 hectares reported for the whole of 2025.

Spain's government said the 172,000 hectares of forested land burned this year was six times greater than the equivalent figure for 2025.

Sánchez told a climate conference the wildfires were not isolated incidents. "It is the most painful manifestation of a climate emergency that is making … wildfires more voracious and heatwaves more frequent, and as a result our land more vulnerable," he said. "It is no longer an exception. It is the rule."

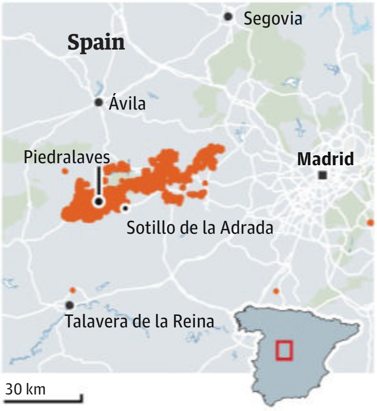
The European Commission's lead official on the green transition, Teresa Ribera, said Europe was not prepared for the consequences of the climate crisis. In an interview with El País, she said the commission would propose an adaptation strategy in October that would be much more comprehensive than policies implemented so far.

A series of heatwaves, including record-breaking temperatures in June, that scientists say would have been impossible without the climate crisis, has left parched soils and tinder-dry vegetation that have fuelled the fires.

A European Commission official said the wildfire season had begun in April and could last until early November. Officials also stressed the rising risks for fighting wildfires this week in France, Spain and Greece.

Scorched Spain
Fires on the outskirts of Madrid

● Active fires, 24 hours to 11.40GMT 26 July



The EU executive has coordinated the dispatch of seven planes and four helicopters to France, as well as six planes and three forest firefighting teams to Spain, after the countries triggered the bloc's emergency assistance mechanism. EU officials, who have been sent to the Bordeaux region to assist local authorities, stressed the unprecedented nature of recent fires, which have spread rapidly over large areas.

A commission official said that a recent fire in southern Spain that killed 13 people had reached speeds of 6 km/h, while firefighters are able to react only to fires moving 300 metres an hour or less.

The scale of Europe's wildfires has raised questions about the continent's ability to respond. Italy is among about 10 European countries that have sent firefighting equipment or teams to France and Spain while grappling with its own blazes.

Several fires broke out in northern and central Portugal, officials said, with over 1,000 firefighters and other professionals battling the flames.

Firefighters fought to extinguish a major wildfire in Italy's southern region of Puglia on Monday. More than 400 people, many of them tourists staying in campsites set among pine forests, were evacuated by sea from the Gargano peninsula on Sunday as the blaze, fanned by strong winds, encroached on beaches.

ANGELA GIUFFRIDA IS THE GUARDIAN'S ROME CORRESPONDENT;
JENNIFER RANKIN IS THE GUARDIAN'S BRUSSELS CORRESPONDENT

◀ Sanae Takaichi's 'big-boned policy' will inject $2.26tn into the economy

KIM KYUNG-HOON/REUTERS

JAPAN

Is Takaichi's mega-budget revolutionary – or a disaster in waiting?

By *Phillip Inman*

International investors are asking where Japan's prime minister will find the ¥370tn ($2.26tn) of extra cash that she wants to invest in 17 industrial sectors by 2040. Such is the scale of spending by Sanae Takaichi's coalition government that many in her own party fear she is about to blow up the Japanese economy.

In financial markets, investors are stunned by the plans of a usually sober Japanese government to rewrite previous budget rules and embark on an unfunded shopping spree.

The roots of Takaichi's frustration date back to the financial crisis of 1991, when Japan's property market bubble burst with spectacular effect. Before the turn of the century, a second slump brought more turmoil when some of Tokyo's largest financial institutions, unable to cope with the hangover of bad debts from the first crash, went under.

Since the 2008 global financial shock, the economy has stagnated. In response, the government has regularly spent 10% more than it receives in tax receipts - much of it to cope with a rapidly ageing population - and debts have continued rising. By 2020, the debt-to-GDP ratio had reached 260% before tighter budgets and a modest improvement in economic growth brought it below 230% in 2025.

Takaichi has said her investment plan will lift productive capacity, keep Japan at the forefront of the AI revolution, and free the economy from its dependence on trade with China.

The stock market has reacted with a succession of downward steps ever since the proposals were unveiled in June, though the renewal of hostilities in the Middle East and the prospect of higher oil prices have not helped.

Many investors sold up as soon as the government arrived in office, hitting the shares of the biggest companies. Sony faces intense competition from rivals in South Korea and China while Toyota has stood out against all-electric cars, and now faces being crushed by China's car industry.

Waning international support for Japan's economic outlook has hit the value of the yen. More recently it is Takaichi's boldness, which is often characterised as recklessness, that has acted as a heavy weight on the currency, pushing it down to 163 to the US dollar, a four-decade low.

Much of the blame for higher debt bills is connected to rising inflation, which has tracked upwards as the yen has fallen, largely because a low currency rate raises the price of imports of energy and raw materials.

Tokyo story
Economy in need of revival

17
Number of industrial sectors that Sanae Takaichi is looking to invest in by 2040

230%
Debt-to-GDP ratio in Japan in 2025, down from a high of 260% in 2020

163
The recent value of the yen to the US dollar, a four-year low for the Japanese currency

Although Japan's core inflation has remained below the Bank of Japan's (BoJ) 2% target over the last four months, analysts predict a jump in the last quarter of the year.

Kelvin Lam, an Asia specialist at the consultancy Pantheon Macroeconomics, said the financial markets fear a lack of detail about where the fresh investment money will come from.

"As long as you don't say how you are going to finance your spending, you are on course for a Liz Truss moment," he said, referring to the market response to the short-lived British prime minister's plans for £45bn ($60bn) of unfunded tax cuts in September 2022.

A draft plan to revive the economy included forcing the BoJ to walk in lockstep with the finance ministry and rewriting how government debt is calculated. A final submission agreed by the cabinet pledged to maintain central bank independence.

"To achieve a strong economy, it is very important for monetary policy to be conducted appropriately to see stable price rises," it said.

The *Honebuto no Hoshin* (big-boned policy) investment scheme is aimed at injecting cash into 17 sectors over the next 14 years to more than double Japan's economic growth to more than 1%. The blueprint targets areas such as AI, semiconductors, biotech, defence, energy and shipbuilding and is aimed at achieving a 1% growth rate "as early as possible".

The document emphasises "physical artificial intelligence" that combines AI with Japan's strength in manufacturing hardware "to accelerate AI transformation in all sectors".

However, financial markets have voiced their scepticism. Many are asking if an emphasis on manufacturing will prove successful as China seeks to produce more sophisticated goods, an area previously dominated by Japan, Germany and the US.

The question is whether Tokyo has the resources to go up against Beijing and carve out a big enough niche to fund itself in the 2030s. Exports rose 20% year-on-year in June, but after taking into account the yen's depreciation, the value of the rise was almost zero.

Depreciating the currency every year to boost trade is not a sustainable policy. Maybe Takaichi's investment plan will be.

PHILLIP INMAN IS SENIOR ECONOMICS WRITER FOR THE GUARDIAN

ANALYSIS
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Automation *Why a jobs apocalypse is unlikely to hit any time soon*

By *Eduardo Porter*

In March, Anthropic - the cutting-edge artificial intelligence business that gave us the chatbot Claude - published an analysis on the impact of AI on employment, to help assess claims that robots were about to redefine human existence, ending demand for human labour.

In May last year, Anthropic's co-founder, Dario Amodei, claimed AI could wipe out half of all entry-level jobs in one to five years. In January, he told us AI would probably become a "general labour substitute for humans".

Last month he said we risk "a world where the economic trade-off dial is stuck on the hypergrowth, hyper-inequality setting".

And yet, Anthropic's report in March suggests that, so far, AI's impact has fallen short of expectations. "We find no systematic increase in unemployment for highly exposed workers since late 2022," the report stated. Deployment of the technology "remains a fraction of what's feasible".

Claude covers just 33% of all tasks in the computer and mathematics category whereas theoretically it could take over nearly 100% of them.

Spending on datacentres is going through the roof, but productivity has not been experiencing the galloping gains that the technorati's epochal prognostications lead one to expect. Labour productivity was, in fact, slower in the first three years of our AI era than during the information technology boom that began in the mid-1990s.

Even OpenAI's Sam Altman, AI's most public face, says he now doubts its job-killing potential. "I don't think we're going to have the kind of jobs apocalypse that some of the companies in our space advocate or talk about," he said in May. As the Massachusetts Institute of Technology economist David Autor noted: "A lot of people have noticed that the world is not changing as fast as they predicted."

This has opened the public conversation to a less cataclysmic narrative of the evolution of the technology. The emerging new story not only puts more *emphasis on the complexity of the relationship between automation and human work* across history. It is also raising doubts about the very feasibility of the threatened AI transformation of the universe.

O-ring argument
One critique of the "AI-will-do-everything" story might be called the O-ring argument. It comes from the 1986 explosion of the space shuttle Challenger. An investigation concluded the demise of the multibillion-dollar spaceship was caused by a rubber O-ring not working at low temperatures. The analogy suggests that as long as AI cannot perform every task perfectly, it will increase the value of the remaining tasks. Depending on what the AI takes over, it could increase the value of high-skilled workers who are relieved by AI of their more mundane tasks, or increase the opportunity of lower-skilled workers by taking over the more expert tasks.

◀ Humans and robots work side by side on an assembly line in Kazo, Japan
ISSEI KATO/REUTERS

The tech-heavy Nasdaq index, which had been propelled almost exclusively by the rise of AI-related stocks, has fallen about 8% since its peak in early June.

As one recent study noted: "Despite strong substitution at the task level, overall employment effects are modest, as reduced demand in exposed occupations is offset by productivity-driven increases in labour demand at AI-adopting firms."

"Insiders are as gung ho as ever," noted Daron Acemoglu, the Nobel prize-winning economist. "They still believe artificial general intelligence is around the corner." Indeed, Elon Musk has not budged from the dream that "AI+Robots will be able to do everything, resulting in universal high income. Work will be optional."

Nonetheless, the politics have soured on the project. Seven in 10 Americans oppose building AI datacentres in their area. While this has to do with their insatiable demand for energy, which drives up local electricity costs, AI's unpopularity is no doubt related to the proposition that it will destroy society as we know it.

The economics look more fragile considering how fast the investment in AI depreciates, as new models overtake those developed just a few months ago. Companies developing AI models "are never going to make money", Acemoglu said. "They are losing hundreds of billions of dollars every year."

One may discount Altman's new modesty as a PR feint. Somebody may have told him equating the AI revolution with mass joblessness was not smart politics. But misgivings about AI's vaunted capabilities are more than a marketing twist. The grand promise may be in trouble. Maybe artificial intelligence can't deliver at a price society is willing to pay.

EDUARDO PORTER IS A JOURNALIST FOCUSED ON ECONOMICS AND POLITICS

▲ Israeli forces detain young Palestinians during raids in the town of Tell

ISSAM RIMAWI/ANADOLU/GETTY

PALESTINE

Israel plans for major operation in West Bank

By *Andrew Roth, Sufian Taha, Quique Kierszenbaum* and *agencies*
JERUSALEM

Israel has said it is preparing a major military operation in the West Bank after four Palestinians and two Israelis were killed during a confrontation that began after armed settlers entered a Palestinian village with support from the Israeli military.

Several people were seriously injured after a scuffle broke out over an Israeli settler's weapon and the military opened fire, according to residents. Dozens have been reported wounded in ensuing settler attacks on neighbouring Palestinian towns.

The shooting in the Palestinian village of Tell, near Nablus, is the deadliest attack in the West Bank this year, and during the reprisals on nearby Palestinian towns, settlers set fire to houses and attacked local people. At least eight more Palestinians had reportedly been hospitalised, most with gunshot wounds.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and defence minister, Israel Katz, called for more troops in the West Bank and the razing of the homes of the accused in Tell, as well as the collection of weapons and revoking of work permits in the village.

Netanyahu also called for the building of new settlement outposts in the area and the legalisation of existing outposts. Unauthorised settlements are illegal under Israeli law.

The head of Israel's Democrats party, Yair Golan, said Netanyahu and Katz's response showed a "clear intent to set the area ablaze". The Palestinian foreign ministry condemned what it called a "massacre committed by settlers in partnership with the occupation forces in the village of Tell".

Video footage showed an armed settler approaching several Palestinian men near the village and pushing them back with his rifle, after which a scuffle broke out and one of the Palestinians reached for the gun. It is unclear who shot the settler, Benayahu Mellet, 32, a security guard.

The Israeli military said it had come to the aid of the settlers, who were taking an "unauthorised and uncoordinated hike" in the village. They claimed a Palestinian resident had taken the rifle and opened fire. The military said Maj Yuval Ezra, 27, a battery commander in an artillery regiment, was also killed in the clash.

The Palestinian health ministry in Ramallah said the Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces. All four were said to be cousins from the same family and have been named as Farouk, Ibrahim, Jawad and Imran Ramadan.

Violence in the Israeli-occupied West Bank has flared in recent days and settlers have called for attacks to "erase" Tell.

The far-right and pro-settler Israeli finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, said the villages of Tell, Iraq Burin and Beit Furik "need to look exactly like the refugee camps in Nablus and Tulkarm", referring to the mass demolition campaign that displaced tens of thousands in the West Bank last year.

Itamar Ben-Gvir, Netanyahu's far-right national security minister, said he would call for the villages in the West Bank to "be treated like Beit Hanoun in Gaza", which has been devastated in bombing raids, and said he would demand that Israel bomb and bulldoze Palestinian houses.

Israel's defence and finance ministers announced plans for illegal settlements in Gaza, and the military commander for the region called violent outposts his "security partners".

ANDREW ROTH IS THE GUARDIAN'S GLOBAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT. SUFIAN TAHA AND QUIQUE KIERSZENBAUM ARE JERUSALEM-BASED JOURNALISTS

PALESTINE

In the swim Classes that offer respite to children

In pools built with sandbags and rubble, traumatised boys and girls can reclaim their stolen childhoods

By *Seham Tantesh* GAZA and *Emma Graham-Harrison* JERUSALEM

Swimming classes have started again in Gaza after three years of war, with hundreds of children learning to float, doggy paddle and take their first strokes in five makeshift sea pools built from sandbags and rubble.

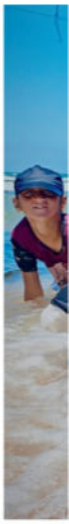
The lessons allow a few hundred girls and boys to reclaim their childhood for a few hours in a place where there are no playgrounds, no formal education and constant fear of continuing Israeli attacks. A UN survey in March found that 96% of children felt death was imminent.

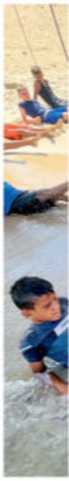
"Swimming gives me a chance to escape the war, and the worries I live with," said Alma Shabat, 13, who saw her mother fatally injured in an Israeli strike in May. After three weeks of classes, she has made new friends and she is no longer afraid of the waves. "Coming to the beach is a beautiful and enjoyable experience," she said.

Amjed Tantesh, who founded Gaza's first swimming academy more than two decades ago, has mobilised dozens of volunteers this summer to create the string of pools on the beaches of central Gaza, with tarpaulins providing shade.

There is very little heavy machinery left in Gaza so they did everything by hand, moving tonnes of rubble and filling sandbags to build walls, then excavating sand to deepen the pools.

In the morning they hold free classes for children whose parents died in the





Read more online
Scan the code to find more about the swimming pool project to help provide free lessons for children in Gaza

▲▲ A boy learns to float

▲ The lessons allow children a chance to relax, cool down and escape the worries of everyday life

◀ Children will also be safer and could become lifeguards for busy beaches

▼ A girl learns a stroke during one of the free swimming classes for children

▼▼ Founder Amjed Tantesh takes a selfie while a class takes place behind him

Photographs by *Amjed Tantesh*

700

The number of children who have so far attended six weeks of classes. The school hopes to raise funding to enable it to run throughout the summer

war. In the afternoon, the pools are open to everyone. "It's a rare chance to relax and reclaim part of their stolen childhood," said Tantesh, who has also worked as a journalist for the Guardian. His niece, Seham Tantesh, reports for the Guardian from Gaza.

The famine caused by Israel's siege last year will leave some children with lifelong mental and physical stunting.

There has been no formal schooling for three years, and almost all school buildings have been damaged or destroyed. There are nearly 700,000 school-age children in Gaza, and only a minority have access to the makeshift tent schools run by aid groups.

"Being here allows me to train, play and breathe fresh air, away from the tents," said Maryam al Musri, 10, whose father died in the war.

Laila Qahman, 14, who lost her seven-year-old brother to the war, said swimming gave her the chance to cool down and forget about life in a tent.

"I come here every other day because it makes me feel like I'm living my life and enjoying my time, instead of staying in the tent listening to the sounds of shelling and living with fear and sadness," she said.

So far 700 children have attended six weeks of classes, and Tantesh hopes to teach thousands more if he can get funding to pay teachers – who are currently all working for free – and cover other basic expenses.

The joy of these young swimmers has been healing for him, as he mourns his older brother Bahjat, a karate champion killed in an Israeli attack last year, as the brothers fled their family home under Israeli evacuation orders.

"Bahjat was the one that taught me swimming in the first place, then inspired me to pursue sporting excellence as a young man," said Tantesh. "To have him die in my arms was the worst thing imaginable."

The original academy was inspired in equal measure by hope and tragedy. Palestine made its Olympic debut at the Atlanta Games in 1996, giving athletes from Gaza the first chance to compete on the world's biggest stage, and Tantesh a new mission. "I wanted to be at the Olympics, but I started as a professional swimmer at a very late age. So I decided to achieve my dream through a new generation," he said.

Closer to home, each summer brought deaths by drowning at sea. Families would flock to the beach to cool off but few people could swim and there were no lifeguards at his local beach. Swimming lessons would make children safer and they could train future lifeguards, he decided.

Tantesh's biggest challenge initially was persuading parents to sign up their children. "People were terrified by water, the sea looked like a monster to them as it consumed dozens of people annually," he said.

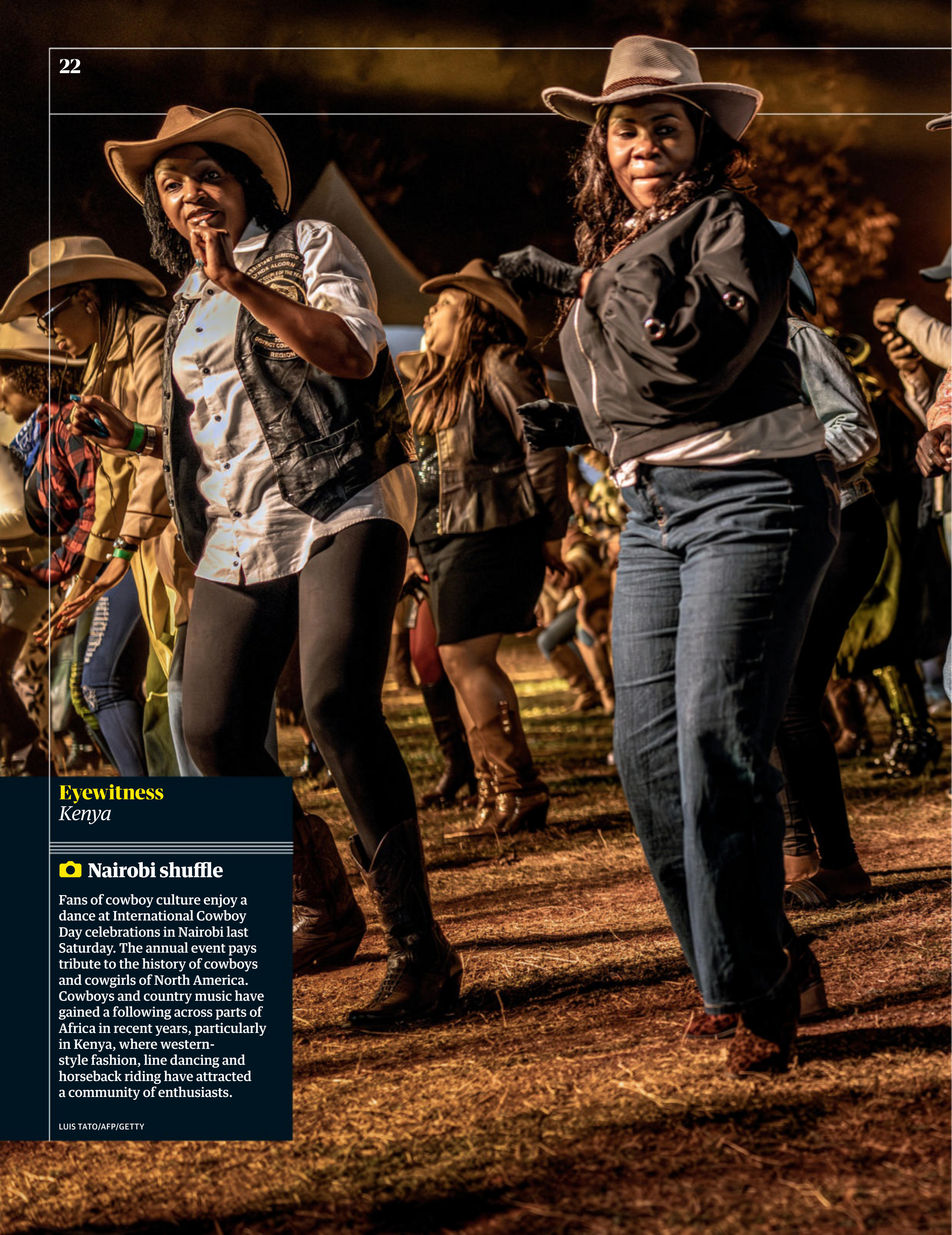
For the first few years children learned to swim in Gaza's port, where breakwaters protected them from the waves. Then he constructed a series of pools along the coast for classes, where about 11,000 people learned to swim.

The biggest, built with rubble from homes bombed by Israel in 2014, was more than 1,000 sq metres. Since 2023 Israeli attacks razed all the pools and killed tens of swimming students and at least six coaches.

Restarting classes seemed almost impossible. "I only had the sea, but the sea is dangerous even during summer. You have jellyfish, you have high waves, strong currents, rocks," he said.

So Tantesh came up with the plan for new pools, for the sake of Gaza's children and as a tribute to his brother. "Actually the first person I helped with this project was myself," he said. "It has given me a great feeling of happiness and recovery. I am alive again."

EMMA GRAHAM-HARRISON IS THE GUARDIAN'S CHIEF MIDDLE EAST CORRESPONDENT; SEHAM TANTESH IS A REPORTER BASED IN GAZA



Eyewitness
Kenya

Nairobi shuffle

Fans of cowboy culture enjoy a dance at International Cowboy Day celebrations in Nairobi last Saturday. The annual event pays tribute to the history of cowboys and cowgirls of North America. Cowboys and country music have gained a following across parts of Africa in recent years, particularly in Kenya, where western-style fashion, line dancing and horseback riding have attracted a community of enthusiasts.

LUIS TATO/AFP/GETTY

A pioneering plan to transform lives stuck in limbo

Amid fears of fresh bloodshed, an inclusive project offering education and employment to refugees could be a model for others to follow

ETHIOPIA

By *Mark Townsend*
ASOSA

It didn't matter that he was so frail he could barely walk. Rahmatalla Abdeen knew if they found him he would be shot. For two days, the 65-year-old had clung to the back of a moped as it navigated an area teeming with militia.

The Rapid Support Forces (RSF) had seized this corner of Sudan after crossing the border from Ethiopia. Abdeen was lucky: on 17 May, he became the last known refugee to cross into Ethiopia from Sudan. There he hoped to find his wife and three daughters 883 days after they were separated when the RSF stormed the city of Wad Madani.

Sudan's metastasising conflict is gradually, inexorably, destabilising the entire region. A vast clandestine RSF training camp has emerged at an Ethiopian military base on the outskirts of the western town of Asosa.

A short distance from the base - its entrance heavily guarded as the Guardian drove past in late June - lies the refugee camp of Ura. Rows of neat tents house 14,500 Sudanese people who have fled the RSF. Their testimony offers an unsettling scenario: the relentless reprisals that characterise Sudan's war may erupt in Ethiopia. Some fear being hunted down by the RSF, a continuation of the genocidal slaughter seen in Darfur.

Khadijah Ahmed escaped the RSF's vicious control of Khartoum two and a half years ago. She recounted the militia's chilling threat: "'We will follow you wherever you go.' They chased us out of the country."

Her two sons are so terrified they are sleeping under their beds, just as they did in Khartoum under RSF rule. Nodding towards the nearby RSF base, the 42-year-old added: "We are in a very dangerous situation."

Dawud Suliman, 31, fled the Darfur town of Zalingei after an RSF offensive in 2024. Half his family - 25 people - were killed. Now he fears his relatives will be hunted down in Ethiopia. "I am very worried," he said.

Residents warn the RSF has already entered the camp, prompting concerns they are compiling kill lists for troops at the Asosa training base 15km away. "We are scared they will report back," said Hamza Al Bashir, 52.

On 21 June, prime minister Abiy Ahmed cruised to another general election victory, confirming what the country knew would happen. Along the Ethiopian capital's boulevards, there appeared to be scant celebration.

Ethiopia teeters on the brink of potential calamity, warn experts. Signs suggest Ahmed's new term may be defined by fresh bloodshed: a resurgence of the civil war with

▶ Refugees from Sudan at the Ura camp in Ethiopia

MARCO SIMONCELLI/AFP/GETTY

Single mother Sowa Belle at her restaurant in the Jewi camp. She hopes to open a chain of eateries

MARK TOWNSEND

Tigray; perhaps an attempt to seize one of Eritrea's Red Sea ports. Ethiopia's involvement in the Sudan conflict next door could also have dire repercussions. A cataclysmic scenario could involve the RSF's opponents, the Sudanese military, teaming up with Tigray separatists, the Eritrean army and Egypt.

Diplomats in Addis Ababa believe the likelihood of a regional, ruinous war is actually helping to suppress any fresh slaughter. "They appreciate the likely outcome is mutually assured destruction," said an official. Some are less sanguine: "Abiy's appetite for carnage? Enough to worry."

Yet UN officials are hyping Ahmed's approach to an inevitable byproduct of any future fighting: refugees.

Three days before the confirmation of his election triumph, the government launched a pioneering project at a glitzy bash at the capital's Adwa Victory Memorial Museum. The venture aims to transform Ethiopia's more than 1.1 million refugees - one of the largest populations in Africa - into social and economic assets. Refugees will be given improved access to education, healthcare and work, allowing them to become integrated, taxpaying residents rather than relying on aid.

Dubbed Makatet - meaning "inclusion" in Amharic - its apparent progressiveness has turned heads. Not only is it a dramatically different approach from the hostile-environment, anti-migrant agenda of Europe and the US, but experts believe it could offer a solution to the global migration crisis.

Advocates include the new head of the UN refugee agency. Barham Salih describes Ethiopia's approach as the most ambitious attempt yet to address the growing displacement of millions.

Traditional approaches are, he says, obsolete. Funding cuts mean long-term humanitarian assistance is unviable. Global instability means refugee populations are trapped in generational limbo. About 70% of the 41.6 million refugees globally have been stranded for at least five years.

"We need to make the refugee population more self-reliant: you cannot keep people dependent on humanitarian assistance year after year. The nature of humanitarianism needs to be redefined," said Salih, a former Iraqi president and refugee himself. The west, added the 65-year-old, has to stop running from the politicised issue.

"This has to be about sharing responsibility," Salih said.

In Ura, Makatet's messaging is going down well. Its population of doctors, teachers and civil servants are desperate to resume ruptured careers and give their children opportunities. Among them is Yousif Babiker, proudly clutching a Hilton name badge, a memento from his role supervising housekeeping at the Khartoum hotel. He prays his four children will find careers elsewhere. "A good education, the chance to work. I hope for this," said Babiker, 49.

Abdeen wants the same for his daughters. In late May he found them again. Wandering Ura he saw Ruaa Idris, his eldest, running towards him.

The 23-year-old has tried everything to continue her education in Ethiopia, attempting to enrol at Asosa university and seeking courses further afield. But she remains determined to become a gynaecologist: "Given a chance, I will catch it with my teeth."

Further south, the sweltering lowlands of the Gambela region sit beside another of Ethiopia's turbulent neighbours. South Sudan's spasms of ethnic violence guarantee a steady influx of arrivals. At least 70,000 people from the Nuer community are crammed into the Jewi refugee camp. Its residents also fear being attacked in Ethiopia.

Nuer people living in the nearby city of Gambela often attack Jewi's refugees, and about 25 people have been killed foraging for food or firewood.

"I don't feel safe here," said Peter Keang. He arrived from South Sudan in March last year after fighting between government forces and Nuer militia that the 38-year-old says killed friends and relatives. "We were chased by drones. Even crossing the river into Ethiopia they were shooting at us."

Nyamach Duoth, 20, was born a refugee in Ethiopia and says her friends are too petrified to leave the camp. "Food supplies have reduced, but people are worried about looking for food in the forest. Women are raped there."

Yet optimism abounds that Makatet might herald a fresh start. Budding entrepreneurs populate the camp - one soap business there has made 168,475 bars and almost $40,000.

There are also fledgling firms in Ura. Miriam Abdallah, 48, has built a perfume production line and set her sights on establishing a scent emporium in Europe. Single mother Sowa Belle, 36, is also thinking big, backing herself to open a chain of eateries called Mama Sowa after insatiable demand for her *kisra*, Sudan's popular bread.

What unfolds next among the occupants of Ethiopia's 24 refugee camps will be keenly watched by western policymakers. Most people in Ura want resettlement in Europe. If Makatet delivers on its promise, analysts believe it offers an alternative model to fortress Europe for mass displacement as refugees are encouraged to build new lives in Africa.

"It's in our national interests," Salih said. "To help deal with this problem as opposed to wishing it away, only to discover that it is coming back. I'm challenging the international system ... This is a moral problem, a human rights problem, a humanity problem."

For the problem to be solved, Ethiopia's pioneering project will need to alter the trajectories of lives like those of Ruaa Idris and her two teenage sisters. Marooned in the hamster-wheel mundanity of life in their remote refugee camp, they watch peers on social media, wondering what might have been. Idris said: "What's the point of safety without living?"

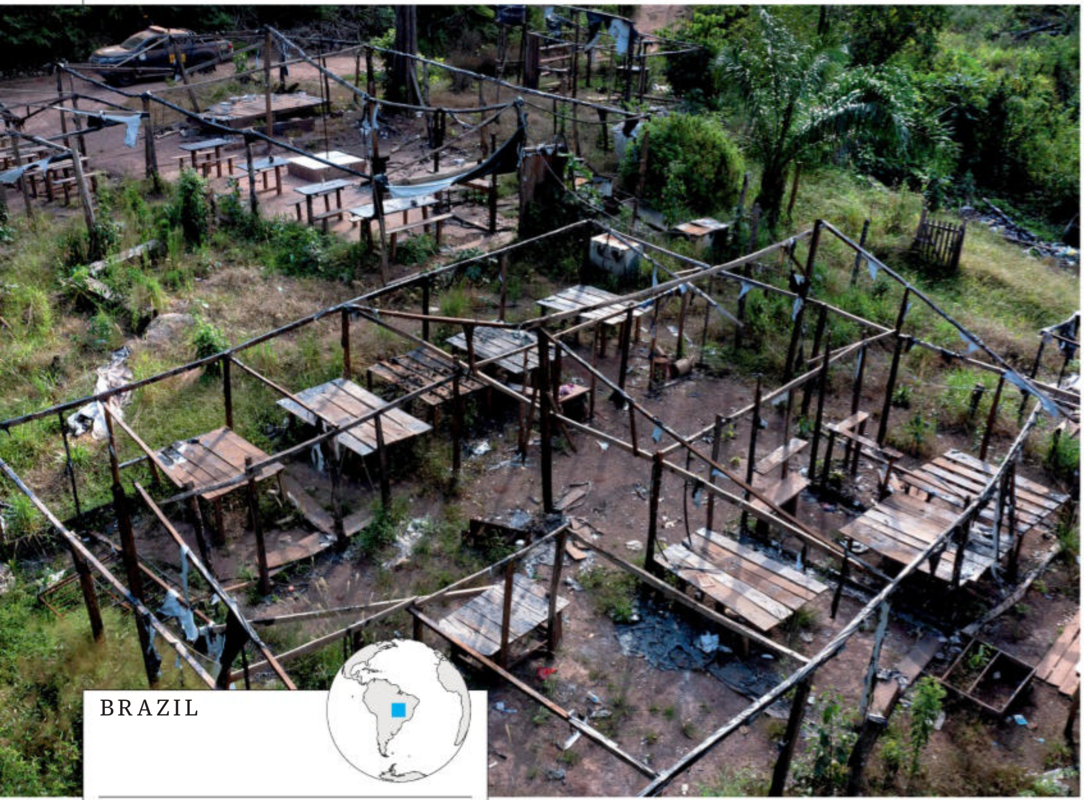
MARK TOWNSEND IS A SENIOR
GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT REPORTER
AT THE GUARDIAN

The venture aims to transform refugees into social and economic assets

70

The percentage of the 41.6 million refugees worldwide who have been stranded for at least five years

Rahmatalla Abdeen in Ura with his daughter Ruaa Idris, who hopes to continue her education



▲ The burnt-out wreckage of the Vila Cururu bordello
JOÃO LAET

BRAZIL

Illegal gold mines in the Amazon razed camp by camp

On the ground with security forces who hunt down the prospectors destroying protected Indigenous land

By *Tom Phillips*
SARARÉ INDIGENOUS TERRITORY

The bordello at Vila Cururu, an illegal gold-mining settlement at the heart of Brazil's most desecrated Indigenous territory, was a hive of depravity until a few weeks ago. Inebriated prospectors huddled around tables, swigging beer and scotch, and ogling pole-dancing sex workers before going with them to shacks behind the brothel.

The encircling encampment also teemed with intruders as hordes of miners used pickaxes and explosives to burrow deep into the hillsides in search of treasure.

"They wiped out everything. They destroyed nature," said Jackson Katitãurlu, an Indigenous leader from the Nambiquara people, whose village is a few miles from the chaos unfolding in the south-western Amazon.

One morning, Vila Cururu was deserted: the once-bustling, illicit community having been razed by Brazilian security forces as they fought to fulfil a pledge by the president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, to eradicate illegal mining after years of mayhem under his predecessor, Jair Bolsonaro.

As Lula's eviction tsar, Nilton Tubino recalled how miners had fled into the forest after troops launched an assault in March to halt one of the most ferocious raids on Indigenous lands in Brazil's recent history.

Other much larger protected territories have suffered damage on a greater scale but nowhere as intense as in Sararé, an area of savanna and woodland near the border with Bolivia that lost 4% of its forests between January 2024 and August 2025. A total of about 45 sq km have been destroyed since the gold rush began five years ago.

"It's total devastation," Tubino sighed as he walked through Garimpo Quatro, one of Sararé's largest mines.

Sararé's ordeal is in part due to the success of Lula's anti-mining crusade, which he launched after returning to power in January 2023. After Tubino's team kickstarted Lula's "disintrusion" drive in the better-known Yanomami Indigenous territory, some miners flocked south to Sararé hoping to avoid the crackdown. Another driving force has been surging gold prices, which have hit record levels.

The Guardian spent two days touring Sararé with government forces, the only foreign media organisation given permission to visit the embattled territory, where about 200 members of the Nambiquara people live.

Seen from a helicopter, the extent of the depredation became clear. Brown gashes had been ripped across the once-verdant landscape, dotted with pools of stagnant, bronze-coloured water contaminated with the mercury that miners use in their sluice boxes.

Above Vila Cururu, the pilot gasped. "It's like a favela. It's like Rio de Janeiro," he said as he flew over dozens of demolished structures cobbled together from tarpaulins and planks.

On a nearby plain, an even larger mine had been gouged out of the forest by excavators. The trees had been cut down and replaced by hills of grey and copper-coloured rubble.

"It's a complete desert. I was born and raised here and when I saw it I just

4%

Proportion of forest that was removed from the Sararé territory between January 2024 and August 2025

▶ Nilton Tubino is on the hunt for illegal miners
JOÃO LAET

couldn’t believe it,” said Katitãurlu, describing how his territory’s rivers had been poisoned and its wildlife scared off by the explosions.

The crisis in Sararé is not the Nambiquara people’s first taste of outside aggression. In David Price’s 1989 book Before the Bulldozer, the anthropologist described how outsiders came to the region in the 1730s when gold was found in the surrounding hills.

More misery came after the Nambiquara were “discovered” in the early 1900s by the explorer Cândido Rondon. That mission “brought new and dreadful diseases to which the Indians had no defence”. Flu epidemics in the 1920s “decimated large groups” in days and a measles epidemic in 1946 “was so devastating that survivors could not bury the dead”, Price wrote.

There was more disease and violence in the late 1970s, as the military dictatorship bulldozed a large highway through their lands with support from the World Bank. The Nambiquara population plunged from 10,000 at the start of the 20th century to about 600.

Saulo Katitãurlu, Sararé’s top Indigenous leader, said he had heard reports of miners roaming the territory with automatic rifles, shotguns and pistols. He was convinced they were faction members and recalled receiving threats from one miner who warned him not to speak out about the destruction, “otherwise I’ll come to your village and kill the lot of you”.

Jackson Katitãurlu, Saulo’s brother, said that a few days earlier, Indigenous hunters had found a corpse with a deep wound to its chest. When police arrived to recover the body, it had disappeared.

Nambiquara leaders said the crackdown appeared to have largely succeeded, for now. But what would happen when troops inevitably left?

“Good question,” Jackson said. “If the operation is suspended, I think they’ll come back.”

Lula’s anti-mining campaign is dangerous and seemingly interminable work for the men and women on the frontline of the Amazonian war against a multibillion-dollar illegal industry. But with another big mission planned for later this year, Tubino vowed that work would go on.

“Holidays? There’s no such thing as holidays,” he said as he sat in the wreckage of a mining shack, mosquitoes swarming around him.

TOM PHILLIPS IS THE GUARDIAN’S LATIN AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

▲ Peasant farmers in protest against new government policy that prioritises big business

LUIS GANDARILLAS/ANADOLU/GETTY

BOLIVIA

Land dispute

Small farmers resist sway of agroindustry

By *Benjamin Swift* LA PAZ

From her home in the Amazon, Vivian Palomequi walked for more than 900km to La Paz to protest over a law she fears would open the door to accelerated deforestation and land privatisation. “We declared a state of emergency and started marching,” said Palomequi, who leads a peasant farmers’ union. “We had no other choice.”

The march was part of a wave of pushbacks against the policies of Bolivia’s new government, which has staffed ministries with former agroindustry leaders, struck deals to open protected areas to mining and criminalised environmental defenders.

Inaugurated in November, President Rodrigo Paz ran as a centrist, offering few environmental proposals beyond a plan to establish domestic carbon markets. His victory marked a political about-face for a nation long dominated by leftist rule.

Yet, eight months into his five-year term, activists and analysts argue that Paz’s policies have continued – or worsened – the extractive agendas of previous administrations.

“It’s the same old policy,” said Ruth Alipaz, an Uchupiamona Indigenous leader from the Amazon north of La Paz. “When a crisis hits, the response is to ramp up resource extraction.”

‘We declared a state of emergency and started marching. We had no other choice’

Vivian Palomequi
Peasant farmers’ union

Stasiek Czaplicki Cabezas, a Bolivian environmental economist, said the government stepped in promising “to change the model”. Instead, the new administration has doubled down on extractivism, he said.

One of the moves that has garnered the strongest opposition was the change in land law that drove Palomequi and hundreds of other farmers to march on La Paz. Passed in early April, it allowed small family-owned plots – which are constitutionally protected from being sold, divided or seized by banks – to be converted to medium-sized holdings, exposing them to foreclosures and corporate buyouts.

Protests forced the government to repeal the law in May, with a replacement planned to be drafted later. Yet Czaplicki Cabezas believes the damage is already done.

“In 10 years, you will see that the small properties that have been converted to medium properties have had higher rates of deforestation,” he said.

The marches came against a backdrop of unprecedented agroindustry influence in the new government. The former president of Anapo, a powerful association of soya bean and wheat producers, now leads the development planning and environment ministry. And the former president of the CAO, Bolivia’s other main agribusiness lobby, was appointed minister of productive, rural and water development.

In May, as protests paralysed the country, the Paz administration signed an agreement with mining cooperatives, lifting barriers to operating in protected areas and Indigenous lands. In April, a ministerial resolution reduced legal requirements for 4,000 non-compliant mining operations.

The recent deals with the mining sector “will create a complete lack of control when it comes to mining in Indigenous territories, the Amazon and protected areas”, said Alipaz.“The government is afraid because it doesn’t want to confront the miners.”

“We marched for our dignity and our rights, and the government refused to meet with us,” Palomequi said. “But when the agribusiness lobby arrives, they get meetings immediately. What’s clear now is that we have to remain vigilant. We are on high alert.”

BENJAMIN SWIFT IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN BOLIVIA

PRICE LIST
YORK
YORK
YORK
我是書店員

◀ A woman in an 'I am a bookstore employee' T-shirt is escorted from her workplace by Hong Kong police
DAVID CHAN/SOPA/SHUTTERSTOCK

TAIWAN

Bookstore slogan goes viral after Hong Kong raids

By *Amy Hawkins* and *Yu-chen Li*
TAIPEI

Walking out of one of Hong Kong's last remaining independent bookstores, hands behind her back but head held high, a woman wore a T-shirt emblazoned with the slogan: "I am a bookstore employee."

Escorted by police, she was among five people arrested during raids on two bookstores this month. They were suspected of displaying and selling publications with "seditious" content, a national security crime that carries a maximum sentence of 10 years.

The T-shirt phrase has spread on Taiwanese social media amid concern for the fate of Hong Kong's booksellers.

Taiwan is the only place in the Chinese-speaking world where people can express their feelings about repression by the Chinese government. On the social media platform Threads, booksellers, lawmakers and activists shared the hashtag "I am a bookstore employee". Taiwan's president, Lai Ching-te, wrote on Facebook: "Ideas and words should never be silenced by political pressure."

It is the third time in recent months that people in Hong Kong linked to independent bookstores have been arrested. The Hong Kong authorities have not specified what the allegedly seditious books were. But Hong Kong's security chief, Chris Tang, said booksellers had a responsibility to ensure their books were lawful, "just like merchants selling food have to make sure their food won't make people sick". All five arrested in this month's raids have since been released on bail.

The Hong Kong police declined to comment further, but reports that the offending books may have included Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China, written by NPR journalist Emily Feng, prompted a run on the book in Taiwan.

The Taiwanese publisher Acropolis Publishing ordered an emergency reprint of 10,000 copies.

Sara Sung, a senior editor at Acropolis, said some readers were buying copies as "a statement of democracy and freedom": "They're showing that they will not be silenced or intimidated."

Chang Hui-ju, the owner of Touat Books, an independent bookshop in Taipei, Taiwan's capital, said she was out of stock of Feng's book. "Before this, hardly anyone paid attention to it," Chang said. "After the incident, the book sold out everywhere."

Another Taipei store, Kuo's Astral Bookshop, also sold out of the book. A customer, Wu Jia-xuan, said she was not interested in China-related books. "The fact that it was banned only made [me] more curious," Wu said.

By the book
Reactions and views on China

10k
Number of copies ordered in an emergency reprint of Let Only Red Flowers Bloom, which was rumoured to be the book that led to bookseller arrests in Hong Kong this month

80%
Proportion of Taiwan's citizens who reject Beijing's suggestion the territory be ruled in a "one country, two systems" framework, similar to Hong Kong

Feng's book examines Chinese leader Xi Jinping's ideological control over the country. One chapter, titled The Bookseller, focuses on the prominent Hong Kong bookseller Lam Wing-kee. He was arrested by Chinese authorities in 2015 but escaped custody and reopened his bookstore, Causeway Bay Books, in Taipei. Lam died earlier this month, and the closed-up shopfront is covered with notes, flowers and cans of beer left by supporters.

Lam's story charts the uneasy relationship Taiwan and Hong Kong have with each other, and with mainland China. Taiwan has never been part of the People's Republic of China. But Beijing has long claimed the self-governing island as part of its territory and vows to unify it with China. One path to peaceful unification, suggested by Beijing, is for Taiwan to be ruled under a "one country, two systems" framework, similar to Hong Kong. Over 80% of Taiwanese reject the idea.

In Taiwan, politicians from the ruling Democratic People's party (DPP), which rejects the idea of closer ties with China, have pointed to Hong Kong as an example of the dangers of what happens under Chinese rule.

Last week, discussing the Hong Kong raids, DPP legislator Wu Pei-yi accused China of "burning books". But in Taiwan, rhetorical support for Hong Kong has rarely been matched by practical policies, such as taking in refugees. For DPP politicians, actual support has been "shallow", said Lev Nachman, a professor of political science at National Taiwan University in Taipei.

For Chinese people, Taiwan is now the last place in the Chinese-speaking world where they can freely access books without the threat of Communist party censorship.

One student visited Touat Books this month looking for a copy of Feng's book. She had read about the Hong Kong raids on social media. "In mainland China, none of this would come up on your feed ... It was quite a shock," she said. "Independent thought should still be allowed - at least in Hong Kong."

AMY HAWKINS IS THE GUARDIAN'S SENIOR CHINA CORRESPONDENT; YU-CHEN LI IS A GUARDIAN RESEARCHER ON CHINA AFFAIRS

SOMALIA

Cafe society

Female baristas are leading coffee boom

By *Moulid Hujale* MOGADISHU

Every morning at six, Saabiriin Hassan takes her place behind the counter at Cplus Cafe in the heart of Mogadishu. The aroma of freshly brewed coffee fills the air, but it is Hassan's smile that draws the attention first.

It stays with her every move - from grinding beans and steaming milk to chatting with customers. Hassan is among the first female baristas in Somalia, serving coffee and helping a new cafe culture take root in a capital city once only known for conflict.

"It started out of curiosity in 2020," said the 23-year-old. "I realised there were no female baristas in the city. I took a three-month course. Since then I fell in love with coffee-making."

Somalis have long been known for their love of camel-milk tea, but as modern coffee shops spring up across Mogadishu, social habits are being reshaped. At the heart of this transformation are young female baristas such as Hassan, challenging gender norms by entering a traditionally male-dominated industry.

"At the beginning, people criticised me for doing this job," she said. "I was told this is a man's job. Some even said nobody would marry a woman who serves men in public."

Six years into her career, her persistence has paid off. The attitudes that once discouraged her are shifting and more young women are now working as baristas. As security has improved in Mogadishu, members of the Somali diaspora have returned, while fear and fighting have given way to the construction of new shopping malls, commercial centres and cafes.

This cafe boom offers more than coffee, however. It brings with it job opportunities for young people - more than 70% of Somalia's population is under 35 - in a country facing many challenges, not least high unemployment. The cafes also create spaces where artists, designers and entrepreneurs can meet.

Coffee may have been discovered in this part of east Africa, but amid the proliferation of coffee shops in Mogadishu many Somalis remain loyal to their sweet, spicy and milky tea. Somali tea is served piping hot, and those trying coffee for the first time request their cappuccino extra hot. Sometimes they like to mix it with camel-milk tea to make their own version of coffee. The trend of mixing is so common that there is even a term for it: *soo dakhar*, meaning to add a shot of espresso.

Yusra Abdifatahi, 21, has been working as a barista at Beydan since 2023 and was recently promoted to branch manager. "I now have more responsibility looking after daily operations, quality control and customer satisfaction," she said.

Abdifatahi is a part-time student and says the job pays her university fees and helps her support her family. She adds that as a result of the work, her social skills and confidence have improved too. "I believe I am on the right track to achieve my dream of having my own business," she said.

Beydan, which describes itself as a "modern pan-African coffee company", began as a home bakery in 2018 in Mogadishu. Today, the company has more than 10 branches across Somalia and employs 136 people, with women making up more than 40% of its workforce.

As demand has increased, colleges and training centres in Mogadishu are now offering barista training courses. When she is not behind the counter at Cplus Cafe, Saabiriin Hassan works as a trainer in one of these centres.

"Most of the students are women," she said. "And that motivates me to continue doing this job and make a difference in the lives of Somali youth. We have come a long way, and I am glad I am playing a small part in this change."

With more than 70,000 followers on TikTok, Hassan shares her daily routine and tips on the art of coffee-making. Unlike other vocational trades such as plumbing, she says working as a barista carries a certain cachet among young Somalis.

"Apparently," she said, "it is not like one of those odd jobs young people despise. A lot of people ask me how they can join and where they can train.

"I see a bright future in Somalia's hospitality sector, and I hope to open my own cafe sometime, *Insha'Allah* [God willing].

"I would encourage young women to acquire as many skills as possible. And never listen to those who say you can't do it."

MOULID HUJALE IS A SOMALI JOURNALIST

> ***'Most of the students are women and that motivates me to make a difference'***
>
> **Saabiriin Hassan**
> *Cplus Cafe*

▼ Saabiriin Hassan is among the first female baristas in Somalia

MOULID HUJALE

SPACE

Did Nasa overlook life on Mars?

Fifty years after Viking 1 landed on the red planet, a fresh look at the research shows something might have been missed

Viking 1 and its successor missions to Mars were looking for life in the form of microbial metabolism and photosynthesis

By *Michael Segalov*

It’s 50 years since humankind’s first foray on Mars. On 20 July 1976, Viking 1 successfully touched down on the planet in a groundbreaking feat. At least, that’s how Nasa tells the story - technically, the Russians did it first in 1971, but contact with the Soviet Mars 3 was lost in seconds, and only a single fuzzy grey image transmitted back to Earth.

Over six years, Viking 1 and its successor returned more than 50,000 images, and mapped 97% of the Martian surface. Their research shapes our understanding of space to this day, in particular their life-detection experiments. “No bodies, no life,” declared Viking chief scientist Gerald Soffen at the time. As Nasa’s website states, Viking “provided no definitive evidence for the presence of living microorganisms”.

But what if they got that wrong, and for 50 years we’ve had the evidence to prove it? That’s the claim of Steven Benner, chemist and former Harvard professor, in his new book, Meet the Neighbours. The repercussions, he argues, are vast.

It’s tricky, Benner says, for scientists to claim they *have* found something. Much safer to state they haven’t. Imagine you’d discovered something unprecedented and revolutionary. “Would you hesitate to announce it to the world? What if two weeks later, some grad student pointed out your basic error?” Scientists like him, Benner says, are “more afraid of being called out for a false-positive than for a false-negative”.

Benner holds degrees from Yale and Harvard, and worked at the latter, alongside institutions including the prestigious Swiss Federal Institute of Technology. He is now the director of a non-profit research organisation, and has also worked with Nasa.

In fact, it was while peer-reviewing grants for the US space agency at its Lunar and Planetary Institute in Houston that Benner made, what he claims, was a major discovery while flicking through the original 1976 Viking mission logs in the library. “Things had quite clearly been missed.”

The Viking missions conducted various experiments to test for life on Mars. Some, such as those searching for microbial metabolism (microbes digesting food) and for microbes performing photosynthesis, are widely accepted to have offered positive results. “These experiments discovered unexpected and enigmatic chemical activity in the soil,” said Nasa.

“But then Viking used Gas Chromatography-Mass Spectrometry (GC-MS) to look for organic material in the soil,” Benner said. “They thought they found no organic materials.”

This is what Benner disputes. “Reading the logs at Nasa in 1999, as a chemist it was clear the GC-MS had detected traces of organics in the Martian soil, but scientists could not explain them, and so dismissed them.”

In 2008, Nasa’s Phoenix lander discovered perchlorates were present in Martian soil. Perchlorates are chemicals which destroy organic materials when heated. The 1970s GC-MS experiment heated Martian soil to 500C. “So we now know this experiment would have destroyed most organic materials in the soil,” Benner said.

If Benner is correct - and there is extant life on Mars - the consequences could be colossal. “It means one of two things,” he argued. “You could have an independent genesis on Mars - a second origin of life.” With Earth, we’re one-for-one when it comes to planets like ours generating life. “If we get two for two, life origin on Mars *and* Earth, it suggests there is microbial life all over the galaxy.” Only this month, scientists announced they’d identified another Earth-like planet outside our solar system.

An alternative reading of Benner’s results is that any life on Mars is a result of interstellar panspermia, the exchange of material between planets. “Rocks hit Mars, get knocked out of the surface and hit Earth, and vice versa,” said Benner. “If we still see extant life on Mars, we are saying that life is resilient to planetary changes.” Earth and Mars have hugely different atmospheres and environments. “If you have one planet seeding life to another planet, and it survives these dramatic changes, again we can expect there to be life on all sorts of rocky planets.”

Benner’s case isn’t that Viking found definitive proof of extant life on Mars. It’s that the evidence *against* life is far weaker than received wisdom. Focus has therefore shifted since the Viking missions, turning to the search for water, habitability and signs of ancient life on Mars - which recent missions have detected.

“Think of all the experiments that *could* have been done, had they properly identified microbial life on Mars,” said Benner. “Instead, we decided not to look for it. That was the decision of the Nasa Astrobiology Institute when it was inaugurated in the late 1990s.” Benner worked there from 1999. “We were told no experiment will fly if it is going to look for extant life on Mars - the Nasa leadership interpreted Viking as a mistake or failure.”

Yes, the organisms we’re discussing are microscopic in scale, but that belies their significance. “Microbial life has a lot in common with you and me,” said Benner. “In fact, you have more microbe cells in you than you do person cells.” What differentiates microbes from, say, a lump of rock, is their capacity for Darwinian evolution. The search for intelligent extraterrestrial life sounds the sexier pursuit, but “what we’re talking about here shapes our assessment of the prospect of finding it”, Benner argued. “I can’t tell you that microbial life will with high probability evolve to intelligent life, but I can tell you this: you do not get intelligent life without it.”

Benner isn’t the first to make a similar claim. Dr Gilbert V Levin, who designed one of the tests used on the Viking missions, spent decades arguing this case. He died in 2021 still resolute, despite being “treated as goofy”, said Benner. The late Mexican astrobiologist Rafael Navarro-Gonzalez agreed, finding soil in Chile’s inhospitable Atacama Desert matched that found on Mars and that Viking “may have been blind to low levels of organics”.

“The community is divided,” said Benner. For now, he says, nobody has stepped forward to disprove his claims. “That’s because most people in this community are geologists, or biologists, and are a little scared to venture into chemistry,” he acknowledged. Nasa told me it does not comment on outside research. The European Space Agency, I was told, was “not aware” of Benner’s publication.

But he’s up for the fight, if/when it comes. “I’m not going to stop until [Nasa head honcho] Jared Isaacman goes on television and acknowledges the issue.” Science, he concedes, isn’t about total certainty. “But right now, nobody is questioning this. They have to be. I’ve been polite for 25 years - now I’m taking no prisoners.”

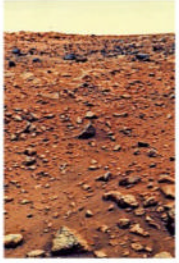
MICHAEL SEGALOV IS DEPUTY EDITOR OF GUARDIAN NEWSLETTERS

97

Percentage of the Martian surface mapped by Viking 1 as part its mission to find evidence of life

6

The duration in years of the expedition, which collated more than 50,000 images of the surface



‘It was clear that traces of organics had been detected in Martian soil’

Steven Benner
Author and scientist

UNITED STATES

‘Shameful’ Pentagon is accused of covering up US casualties

By *David Smith* WASHINGTON

The Pentagon is taking a “shameful approach” to releasing information about US casualties in the Iran war, Leon Panetta, a former defence secretary and CIA director, has told the Guardian.

Officials have faced accusations that they are engaged in a cover-up designed to hide the true cost of Donald Trump’s war on Iran, fearing a public backlash before November’s midterm elections, while the Pentagon has not held a press briefing for two-and-a-half months.

Panetta, who held weekly Pentagon briefings during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, criticised the department for failing to disclose how many people had been hurt in bomb attacks by Iran on US bases.

He said: “There’s a deliberate effort here to withhold information from the American people, and I think it represents a shameful approach to sharing the responsibility that we all have when it comes to fighting a war.”

The number of US troops killed in the war on Iran stood at 14 at the end of last week, before being quietly updated to 18 with more than 600 injured at the end of last weekend. The first figures were the point of contention after the Pentagon previously reduced the totals from 18 deaths and 482 wounded that had been recorded just days earlier. Sean Parnell, a Pentagon spokesperson, blamed “a temporary data disruption”. Critics, however, say the information blackout is a calculated political strategy to hide a failing military intervention.

Last Monday, the Pentagon had said 100 service members had been injured since 7 July but that 96% had returned to duty. The department initially failed to disclose the figures, according to a New York Times report, only belatedly acknowledging the casualties in a social media post.

Ned Price, a former deputy to the US representative to the UN and former spokesperson for the state department, said: “This goes beyond a run-of-the-mill administration distrust toward and hostility against the press. This is more about shielding the American people from the true and total cost of this war.”

18
The number of US troops killed in the war on Iran as of last weekend, with more than 600 injured

37.5
The cost to the US, in billions of dollars, of the war on Iran so far

▼ The bodies of two personnel are returned to the US at Dover air force base in Delaware last week
JIM LO SCALZO/EPA

Even during contentious, unpopular wars in Vietnam and Iraq, the lines of communication were kept more or less open. But since Trump’s return to power in January 2025, the Pentagon - restyled as the Department of War - has been restricting access. It ousted major outlets, including the New York Times, National Public Radio and Politico, from their long-held desks, supplanting them with Trump-friendly media such as Breitbart, One America News Network and the New York Post. In May, it imposed restrictions on the free movement of reporters in much of the Pentagon building.

The current obfuscation is particularly jarring when contrasted with the opening days of the Iran war when Pete Hegseth, the defence secretary, was a ubiquitous presence, delivering bombastic briefings in which he crowed about annihilating the Iranian military with “no mercy” and restoring the US as a nation of “real warriors”.

Joel Rubin, a former deputy assistant secretary of state, said: “When you’re not able to communicate clearly what’s actually taking place on the ground, that means you’re likely not confident or comfortable with what is happening on the ground.”

Though Hegseth has avoided the media, he was obliged to attend a hearing on Capitol Hill last week to defend a war that has already cost the US $37.5bn. During a Senate appropriations committee hearing, politicians on both sides of the aisle expressed deep frustration with the administration’s endless demands for money coupled with its refusal to provide straight answers or a coherent strategy.

The Pentagon denies that it is minimising reports of casualties. Sean Parnell, its chief spokesperson, said: “President Trump and Secretary Hegseth have been constantly providing updates directly to the media and the American people online, delivering clear, unfiltered insight into our objectives and decisive actions.”

Although briefings have dried up, the news has not, and Pentagon beat reporters continue to pursue information. Panetta said: “In essence what they’re doing is challenging the press to find what’s really happening, and they will. They can dodge, bob and weave, they can hide it, but my experience is that no matter how much you try to hide it, in the end the truth comes out.”

DAVID SMITH IS THE GUARDIAN’S WASHINGTON BUREAU CHIEF

◀ Javier Milei with Flávio Bolsonaro in São Paulo, Brazil, last Saturday

ALLISON SALES/NURPHOTO/SHUTTERSTOCK

ARGENTINA

Milei seeks new friends among Latin America's far right

By *Tiago Rogero*

Argentina's president, Javier Milei, is not particularly fond of travelling to multilateral forums – it is not unusual for him to skip Mercosur summits, as he did a few weeks ago.

But last Saturday he began a tour of Latin America to meet far-right leaders, starting in Brazil with the launch of Senator Flávio Bolsonaro's presidential campaign against the leftwing incumbent, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, ahead of October's election.

Milei was then due to attend Keiko Fujimori's inauguration in Peru on Tuesday, followed by Abelardo de la Espriella's inauguration in Colombia on 7 August, from where he will travel to Ecuador to meet President Daniel Noboa.

The self-styled libertarian has justified the trips as those of "a president willing to open up to the world, seeking to triple the country's trade". But analysts point to the timing: amid his declining popularity at home, the tour comes in the wake of a wave of far-right victories in presidential elections across Latin America.

"As someone who has been in power a little longer, Milei is trying to establish himself as a leader of that group," said Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, a researcher and professor at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile.

"I've never seen Milei take much interest in official visits to other countries," said Juan Gabriel Tokatlian, a sociologist and professor at Universidad Torcuato Di Tella in Buenos Aires. "What interests him are figures from the world of big tech and the far right, but in neither case is there any real interest in opening trade negotiations," he added.

Benjamin Gedan, a senior fellow and director of the Stimson Center's Latin America programme, said a constant in Milei's trips has been his effort to remain "deferential to the US president, Donald Trump, and never trying to upstage him".

When Trump took office in January 2025, Milei faced relatively little competition for his affection in Latin America, where fewer than a dozen other far-right presidents were in office, most notably El Salvador's Nayib Bukele. Trump described Milei as his "favourite president".

Since then, however, rightwing or far-right candidates have won all seven presidential elections held in the region, with Trump accused of attempting to influence some of them.

Almost all of the winners also interacted with Milei during their campaigns through public exchanges of praise or video calls but, according to Tokatlian, there is no doubt about whom they were really trying to please.

"All these rightwing leaders see Milei as a kind of proxy for Trump, who is the one who is really in charge. They don't want to be under any kind of Argentine leadership," he said.

Tokatlian believes that ***any contest for Trump's favour***, if one exists at all, will be decided by "whoever gives the US the most on drug trafficking, migration, military cooperation and containing China's influence".

Shield agreement The US has signed a series of military cooperation agreements with countries across the region. In March, Trump launched the Shield of the Americas, a "counter-cartel coalition" made up of far-right leaders aligned with him. Notably absent were key countries for drug production and trafficking in the region – Mexico, Brazil and Colombia – all of which are governed by leftwing administrations. After being elected, Abelardo de la Espriella said that Colombia would join the initiative and establish a local Shield of the Americas office in Medellín.

Ariel Goldstein, a researcher and professor at the University of Buenos Aires, believes Milei remains ahead of the others in the race for Trump's attention. "He has already spent the past two or three years building an intense relationship of friendship and subordination with the US," he said.

When Trump was re-elected, Milei travelled to Palm Beach to become the first foreign leader to meet him after his victory.

Argentina's president has also emulated a number of policies of his US counterpart, including withdrawing from the World Health Organization and tightening immigration policies.

Last year, Trump offered a $40bn US bailout that was widely seen as crucial to the libertarian party's victory in Argentina's midterm elections.

However, Milei's path to re-election next year is looking far from smooth: although inflation has fallen, purchasing power has also declined, while unemployment has risen and his administration has been hit by corruption scandals.

Meanwhile, Goldstein believes that Milei and Trump are now heavily invested in winning the next major prize on the electoral calendar: Latin America's largest country, Brazil.

Besides attending the launch of Flávio Bolsonaro's campaign, Milei had hoped to visit the senator's father, former president Jair Bolsonaro, who is under house arrest after being convicted over an attempted coup, but the request was denied by a justice.

"A Bolsonaro victory would be hugely important to Milei and Trump because it would allow them to reorganise the whole region around an axis of subordination to the US," said Goldstein.

TIAGO ROGERO IS THE GUARDIAN'S SOUTH AMERICA CORRESPONDENT

‘We cannot destroy this beautiful world’

Hiroshima survivor Koko Kondo reflects on her father’s extraordinary diary – recently discovered in the Yale University archive of writer John Hersey. The memoir bears witness to the horror of the US dropping the most deadly bomb in history.

By Simon Hattenstone

Portrait by
AYA FUJIOKA

KOKO KONDO HOLDS UP A TINY SALMON-PINK DRESS. "This is what I was wearing," she says. The dress, with its white-ribboned collar, is in perfect condition. A miracle.

On 6 August 1945, Koko was eight months old and crawling on a tatami mat at the family parsonage. Mrs Takaki, a member of the church, had just popped round to have a chat with Chisa, Koko's mother. Chisa gathered Koko up in her arms so she wouldn't be a distraction, and they stood by the door. It was 8.15am on a serene summer day in Hiroshima. That was when the uranium-fuelled atom bomb, named Little Boy by the Americans, was dropped. The most deadly bomb in history. Koko and Chisa were buried in the rubble, unable to move. The parsonage roof had crashed down on them. For 40 years, Chisa couldn't bear to tell Koko about the day, the pink dress and how they survived. It was too painful.

Today, 81 years on, Koko is talking to me via video link. She is an elegant woman with a kind face and a vertiginous silver quiff. She speaks quietly in perfect English, then surprises you by stamping on a word fiercely to make her point. The virtual background to her screen is the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, which was built on ground zero, the point directly underneath where the bomb exploded.

Chisa could not breathe and was on the verge of losing consciousness. Koko's screams brought her round. Chisa eventually clawed her way out of the rubble. She made a hole big enough to push Koko through, then crawled out after her. "The whole house crashed. If I had still been crawling on the floor, she probably wouldn't have been able to find me. Without my mother I wouldn't be here," Koko says.

The parsonage and the Hiroshima Methodist church were around 1km from ground zero. Both were destroyed by the blast and subsequent fires, alongside the other homes in the closely packed residential area. Chisa could find nobody to help Mrs Takaki, who was also buried in the wreckage.

As for Koko's father, the Rev Kiyoshi Tanimoto, he was in another part of the city and also survived. Koko and her parents were lucky. Two days after the bomb, her aunt came to Hiroshima, with her baby daughter Kumiko, to support them. Kumiko suffered radiation sickness and died five months later.

Her father often told Koko she was the only baby in the neighbourhood to survive, and that she had a duty to remind the world what had happened. But for half her life, she turned her back on the enormity of the bomb. Like her mother, she found it too much to bear. So she made a new life for herself away from the carnage.

Tanimoto was one of six survivors featured in a seminal 1946 New Yorker article by John Hersey that revealed the bomb's true impact on the city. Before that, coverage had been limited and censored. Hersey's 31,000-word piece filled the whole magazine, which sold out in a few hours. The piece was turned into a bestselling book that year. It was updated in 1985 when Hersey returned to Hiroshima 40 years on to see what had become of the city and the six survivors. In his postscript, he wrote: "What has kept the world safe from the bomb since 1945 has not been deterrence … so much as it's been memory."

A few years ago, an astonishing historical document was discovered in Hersey's archive at Yale University: Tanimoto's real-time account of the disaster. Apart from a handful of academics, nobody knew this 230-page diary existed. It is being published in book form, with a moving introduction by Koko. "I am 81 years old now. I am grateful for the life I almost didn't have, and I love this world. There are not many of us still alive - the *hibakusha*, as the survivors are called. We are the only people left who experienced an event that remains unique in human history," she writes. "My father had been a direct witness to a singular event." And it has taken until now for the world to read this astonishing testimony to our capacity for barbarity and the power of human resilience.

THERE WERE ABOUT 350,000 PEOPLE in Japan's seventh largest city the day it was bombed. The heat after the bomb exploded was 3,000-4,000C at ground level. Between 60,000 and 80,000 people died instantly or on the day, and by the end of 1945 the death toll had risen to about 140,000. An estimated 69,000 to 80,000 suffered non-fatal injuries. Of 76,327 buildings, 68% were flattened and only 10% were left intact. Three days later, a second atomic bomb hit Nagasaki. Between 40,000 and 75,000 people died on the day, and by the end of the year the Nagasaki death toll had risen to 60,000 to 80,000. The bombs led the Japanese to surrender, but at an obscene cost.

At 8.15am, Tanimoto was 3km away from ground zero, on the outskirts of the city in the suburb of Koi. He was helping his friend Mr Matsuo move clothing and furniture to a safer place by pushcart. Its citizens were expecting to be bombed - after all, Hiroshima was home to the headquarters of the country's second general army, served as a massive embarkation port and had about 43,000 military personnel stationed there. It just wasn't expecting this kind of bomb.

Tanimoto and Matsuo were at the front door of a large estate in the valley belonging to a wealthy rayon manufacturer. When Tanimoto saw a sharp flash of light streak out of a brown cloud, he dropped to the ground on his belly. (Matsuo ran into the house to hide. Although the building collapsed, he survived.) Two large decorative granite rocks shielded Tanimoto from the heat and flying debris. When he stood up a few seconds later, day had turned into night, and drops of rain the size and colour of blackberries fell out of the sky. He ran up Mount Mitake, the hillside overlooking Koi. Hiroshima was a sea of flames.

An old woman with a little boy approached Tanimoto and said she was injured. He put the boy on his back and took him to a school acting as a first-aid station. But all he could think about was Chisa, Koko and his church members. He sprinted through the devastation over dead bodies and injured people. To his shame, he continued running.

"So many people asked for help," Koko says today. "'Help! Help! Help!' But people were caught under houses and he couldn't pull bodies from out of there, so he said: 'I'm sorry, I'm sorry, please forgive me!' He said to me: 'On that day I only thought about what's happened to my daughter and wife.'" He felt guilty? "Yes, and when I heard that, I thought: 'OK, Dad, you did a good job.'"

Remarkably, Tanimoto came across the blood-stained Chisa and Koko near a Shinto shrine. They were too traumatised to embrace. Tanimoto simply acknowledged that they were safe, and they parted. Chisa and Koko went to shelter in the suburb of Ushita, and he continued running into the city to help others.

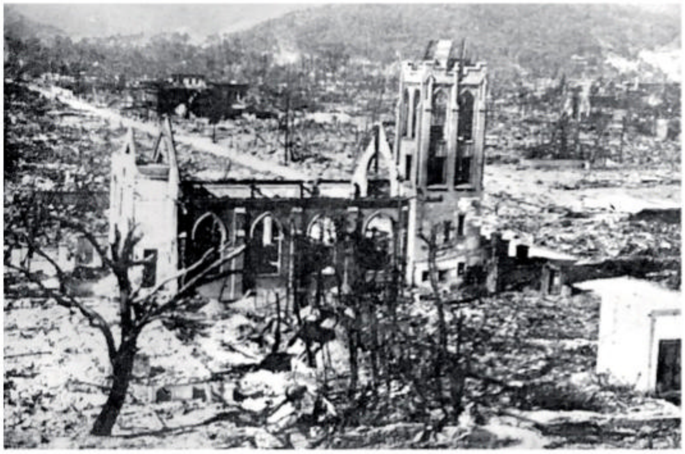
Tanimoto's fame spread from Hiroshima through Japan and on to the US, where he toured tirelessly, asking for money to rebuild his church and the city, and to create a peace centre. He told anybody who would listen about what he'd seen, preached Christian pacifism and argued for the elimination of all nuclear weapons.

Perhaps he was best known for featuring in Hersey's Hiroshima. Hersey, then aged 31 and already an experienced war reporter and Pulitzer prize-winning novelist, told the story of the bomb and its aftermath by piecing together the lives of the survivors.

It was one of the first examples of what became known as new journalism, in which reporters used creative storytelling techniques associated with fiction to create compelling narratives rather than

Life, interrupted Atomic bomb survivor Koko Kondo at the Centenary College for Women; family portrait including Kiyoshi Tanimoto and Koko; Hiroshima Nagarekawa church after the bomb

KOKO KONDO



As Koko grew up, her father reminded her it was her duty to work for Hiroshima and world peace

simply reporting cold facts. In 1999, the article was ranked as the finest piece of American journalism of the 20th century by a panel of experts assembled by New York University's journalism department.

Tanimoto's account, based on his diaries, is the perfect complement to Hersey's Hiroshima. Whereas Hersey tells the story through supremely crafted, understated reportage, Tanimoto's version is a gripping real-time search for life and hope. Everything he sees is meticulously recorded: the flesh of the injured stripped away or hanging loose; survivors walking silent and expressionless "like a procession of ghosts"; houses looking "like toy buildings crushed by a hammer". He describes soaking scattered cushions in a water tank, holding them against himself then running through fire. Victims are incinerated to white ash. A skeleton hangs on to the door of a streetcar.

Tanimoto comes across as the haunted hero of an apocalyptic action movie (which his story is being turned into). He hauls five dead men out of a boat, says a prayer for them, then ferries the injured across the Kyobashi River using only a single bamboo pole. He helps put out the blaze when trees catch fire in the Sentei Gardens, steals irradiated pumpkins to feed the sick, takes people by the hand only to find their flesh coming away like cooked fish off a bone. Even when he goes down with radiation sickness, suffering from high fever and violent diarrhoea, he continues until he's on the verge of death. Tanimoto is as tough on his family as himself. When Chisa tells him that she had escaped without finding out what had happened to Mrs Takaki, he is indignant. (They later discovered that Mrs Takaki survived.)

TANIMOTO HAD ONLY LIVED IN HIROSHIMA for two years when it was bombed. He had gone from Japan to the US to study and graduated with a degree in theology from Emory University in 1940. This is why he still felt such warmth towards the US despite the bomb, Koko says. I ask her if her father was her hero. "I guess so, because he was so concerned about peace. He loved the United States, he loved Japan and he wanted to rebuild relationship between them. He so wanted world peace."

In the book, we travel through the city with Tanimoto. He names every victim he finds and tells their story. It's an extreme act of bearing witness. He prays over the dying Tanaka, a wealthy man who despised him and spread rumours that he was a US spy. We hear about the high-school girls who suffocate in the smoke while singing Kimigayo, the national anthem of Japan; the stench of the dead baby carried by its mother for three days in the hope that her missing husband could see the child a final time. Tanimoto describes the dead floating in the river and his attempts to row past them. "I had no more human feelings," he writes. "Pushing aside the dead, I propelled my boat."

There are moments of hope. Flowers and vegetables start to grow instantly out of the ruins. The radiation has somehow encouraged new life. He visits a woman whose eyeballs had been removed because of her injuries, and gifts her an aubergine, saying: "I hope you can overcome the atomic bomb as this plant has done." Perhaps the greatest hope lies in the possibility of rebirth. Today's Hiroshima is a vibrant, urbane city with a population of more than 1 million.

As Koko grew up, her father reminded her that as the youngest survivor in their neighbourhood, it was her duty to work for Hiroshima and world peace. "'No, sir,' I told him. 'Not me.' I didn't want to share in the trauma, or make it mine," she says today. She refused to take her friends to talks he gave about the bomb.

But its impact was there for her to see in everyday life. The parsonage played host to older, disfigured girls she regarded as sisters. Eyelids were stuck to foreheads, lips to chins, fingers were fused together. For a long time, she didn't realise the girls were orphans. Other disfigured children just hid at home. "Girls stayed inside a big mosquito net so nobody could see them. Many families broke every mirror they had because otherwise the children who were disfigured would see their faces."

As soon as she discovered this had all been caused by the American atom bomb dropped from a B-29 aircraft, she swore revenge. “I said: ‘When I’m a grownup I’m going to find the people who flew the B-29 Enola Gay and I’m going to give them a punch or bite or kick.’”

Incredibly, she got the opportunity to do so.

Ten years on from the bomb, Tanimoto was famous in the US for his work on behalf of Hiroshima. He had taken 25 disfigured young women, known as the Hiroshima Maidens, for reconstructive surgery at Mount Sinai hospital in New York. The US version of the TV series This Is Your Life surprised him. He thought he was going to give yet another interview about Hiroshima, but he was the subject of the show. That episode gained notoriety as one of the most shocking, tasteless and strangely moving TV programmes ever.

In between promotions for Hazel Bishop nail varnish, the presenter Ralph Edwards told the story of Tanimoto and Hiroshima. Behind a curtain, a surprise guest said: “Looking down from thousands of feet over Hiroshima, all I could think of was: ‘My God, what have we done?’” Tanimoto was frozen in shock when Edwards introduced the guest – Capt Robert Lewis, co-pilot of the Enola Gay. The tiny Tanimoto and the huge, bull-necked Lewis shook hands in bewildered silence. Koko was in the audience, and the show changed her life.

“I will never forget that day,” she tells me. “I was just staring at him. He’s a bad one. But after he said that, I saw the tears coming down from his eye. I was so surprised. I thought he was a *monster*. I never heard of tears coming out of a monster’s eyes. So this person must be a human being like me.” At the end of the show, she held his hand. In 1983, Lewis died, aged 65. “The first thing that came back to my mind was the inscription at the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park. I said: ‘Rest in peace – we shall never repeat the mistake.’”

DESPITE THE REVELATION when meeting Lewis, Koko still wanted nothing to do with Hiroshima. This resolve was hardened by a humiliation in her early teens. The *hibakusha* had annual medical checkups for radiation sickness. She was used to them, but one year she was led to an auditorium full of men speaking different languages. She didn’t know whether they were even doctors. Koko was told to go on the stage, and a light was shone on her. A voice asked her to remove her gown in front of the men. “It really hurt my feelings,” she says simply. You can still hear her pain when she talks about it. “I stared at the ceiling and removed the gown,” she writes in the intro to her father’s book. “I felt so *ashamed* that I didn’t mention it to anyone for 25 years. I never again wanted to be identified as a victim of the bomb.”

There was so much discrimination against the *hibakusha* in Hiroshima and elsewhere. They struggled to find partners, get jobs, rent property. “Not many people want to marry a survivor who has experienced the atomic bomb,” she says. “Not many companies wanted to hire survivors, because their health might not be good.”

As her father had done, Koko left Hiroshima to study in the US. She graduated from American University in Washington DC with a degree in psychology and sociology. Koko fell in love with a Chinese-American student. They got engaged. Her fiance’s uncle was a specialist in radiation sickness and told the family that she would never give birth to a healthy child. His parents made her fiance call the wedding off.

She returned to Japan in 1969, aged 24. By now she had lost her faith. In Tokyo she met Yasuo Kondo, a young documentary film-maker. He admired the work of her father, and the couple had a natural affinity, not least because he was an atheist. “Life is interesting. Ha ha ha!” Koko has a joyous, hiccupy chuckle. “He became a Christian and later a minister of the church.” Just as she couldn’t escape from the impact of the bomb, she couldn’t escape the church. Her faith returned.

Koko suffered a miscarriage, and the couple decided not to try for children again. Medical assessments concluded that radiation sickness left her unable to carry a pregnancy to term. She and Yasuo adopted two newborn babies, who are now in their 40s. When he retired from his pastoral ministry in January 2025, they returned to Hiroshima.

For many years, Koko worked in business. It was only when she turned 40 that she began to think seriously about Hiroshima. Her mother finally told her how they had escaped and revealed that she had saved the pink dress. When Hersey returned to Japan in 1985 to catch up with his survivors, the conversation opened up further. A year later, Tanimoto died, aged 77. Koko realised he had been right all along. It was her duty to take up his mantle. “I don’t think I can do it like he did, but I just wanted to walk in the footsteps of my father,” she says.

She worked with orphans and abandoned children, and became a renowned peace campaigner in her own right. She presented Mikhail Gorbachev, president of the then Soviet Union, with a crystal globe as a symbol of the fragile Earth; shared philosophies of forgiveness with Desmond Tutu; advocated for nuclear disarmament with then US president Jimmy Carter; and last year Pope Leo XIV welcomed her to a peace conference in Rome. Like her father, she believes it is important to acknowledge the harm Japan caused with its aggressively expansionist ideology in the 1930s and 40s.

DESPITE THEIR PHENOMENAL WORK, Kiyoshi Tanimoto and John Hersey were controversial figures. Not everybody was convinced by Tanimoto’s altruism. Critics said he was a vain publicity seeker. They laughed at the flash Cadillac he briefly drove (an American friend had passed it on), challenged his use of funds and questioned why he only sent young women to the US for plastic surgery.

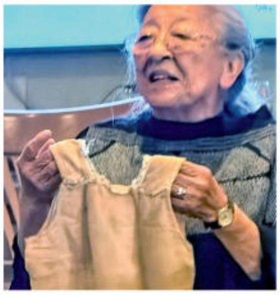
“I don’t know why my father was so concerned about the girls, not the boys,” Koko says. “As a father he might have been conscious of the beauty, and he knew life could be even more difficult for the disfigured girls than the boys.”

After one of the “maidens” died in an operating theatre in the US, he was accused of exploiting them for political spectacle and medical experimentation. Meanwhile, the security services, on both the Japanese and US sides, were suspicious of Tanimoto’s support for the US. After his This Is Your Life appearance, there were suggestions that he might be an agent of the US or China. Some dismissed him as a useful idiot. Yet he had saved many lives and helped to broker peace.

Hersey was also regarded as politically suspect by the US security services. He spent the first 11 years of his life in China, where his American parents were Protestant missionaries. The Hiroshima article was considered anti-American, and the US war secretary Henry Stimson countered it with a defence of the atom bombs, arguing that they were the “least abhorrent choice” that saved more than a million American lives by avoiding a mainland invasion. In 1950, during the height of McCarthyism, the liberal Hersey was labelled a communist by J Edgar Hoover’s FBI.

While these were blatant smears, some criticism was justified. The writer celebrated for the integrity of his work went on to be accused of plagiarism in both his journalism and fiction. In 1988, five years before his death, Hersey apologised for a piece he wrote in the New Yorker about the novelist James Agee after Laurence Bergreen, Agee’s biographer, complained that material had been lifted from his book.

Even Tanimoto’s recently discovered Hiroshima book is contentious. Why was it found in a box among Hersey’s papers at Yale



Bearing witness Koko Kondo holding the dress she was wearing as a baby when the atomic bomb went off in Hiroshima in 1945; paying a visit last month to the city's Peace Memorial park

KOKO KONDO; AYA FUJIOKA

> **‘I said I’m going to find the people who flew Enola Gay and I’m going to give them a punch’**

University, where he went on to become a professor of English? Why had neither Hersey’s nor Tanimoto’s families known about it?

The Japanese film-maker Taku Nishimae and Hersey’s grandson Cannon Hersey came across the book when researching his life. But even they disagree about when it was found - Nishimae tells me it was 2022, while Cannon insists it was back in 2014, when they made their first documentary together. They are agreed, however, that it was in the form of a perfectly typed 230-page English-language diary starting on 6 August 1945 and ending in November 1947. The new book condenses the diaries and limits it to the year after the bomb.

Nishimae thinks Hersey was given the manuscript during one of Tanimoto’s visits to the US in 1948-49, but Cannon suggests it may have been later. I call Nishimae in Japan and ask if he thinks Tanimoto would have wanted it published. “Yes, certainly,” he says. Why does he think Hersey did nothing to publicise it? “I don’t know. We don’t even know how it ended up in Yale library. There is no record. There are lots of letters between John and Kiyoshi, and there is no mention of the manuscript at all. It’s incredible. And it’s incredible that we found it.”

He tells me about the genesis of the relationship between Hersey and Tanimoto. When Hersey arrived in Hiroshima, Tanimoto couldn’t initially meet him, so he wrote a nine-page letter for him about his experience. By the time they met, a day later, Hersey had read it and told him he found it “quite moving”. Cannon and Nishimae found the letter in 2014 when researching their documentary. “It is very similar to the account Kiyoshi is writing in his diary, and John Hersey used those texts in the original book Hiroshima.” Hersey quotes extensively from it, saying it was a letter “sent to an American”. (He never refers to himself in the piece.)

Why did he remain silent about the full manuscript he later received? Perhaps he thought Tanimoto’s memoir would detract from his bestselling book, I suggest to Nishimae. “Mmmm,” he considers. “I don’t think so. He was very generous and they were great friends. John was working with him all along until Kiyoshi passed in 1986. I think it was just a lost memoir in his library.”

Tanimoto revered Hersey and his work. In 1949, he translated Hersey’s Hiroshima into Japanese. He believed the book had made it far less likely that nuclear weapons would be used again, and that without it the rest of the world would have remained oblivious to the full horror.

From New York, Cannon tells me he doesn’t think it was the job of his grandfather to find a publisher for Tanimoto’s manuscript. Nor does he think he would have succeeded if he had tried. “I don’t think the publishing world was ready to publish a book like this in the late 1940s or early 1950s. It’s only now that we’re seeing space made for people of colour to tell their story.”

As for Koko, the thing she cares about is that her father’s book is now out there. And the lessons are as important as they were 81 years ago. She finds it distressing that nuclear warheads still in commission are far more powerful than the ones that destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

For the rest of her life, she hopes to show people her pink baby dress and explain its significance. And she will continue to pass on her message that hope can emerge from the most profound despair. A few years ago, she discovered that a positive had come out of her teenage humiliation. “I was told that all the medical data from the children from Hiroshima was given to Chornobyl to help the children there. When I heard that, my *gosh*! My bad memory helped other children. It made me so happy.”

Most of all, she is determined that Hiroshima and Nagasaki will never be repeated. “I don’t want to see any child go through that. That’s why I do not want to see any war in this world. This *beautiful* world.” And she swirls the word around in her mouth as if she can taste it. “Think of it. We cannot destroy it.” ●

SIMON HATTENSTONE IS A GUARDIAN FEATURES WRITER

Hiroshima, 8:15: The Lost Memoir by Kiyoshi Tanimoto is published on 6 August

Coastal erosion

PAPAS
FISH
CHIPS

Reporting from some of the UK's poorest seaside towns reveals how young people have been left isolated – but remain resilient and full of hope

By Lisa Bachelor and Polly Braden

Photographs by POLLY BRADEN

Orson
Blackpool

◀ Cleethorpes: like many coastal areas, the Lincolnshire town has high unemployment

Eleanor
Morecambe

Annalise
Whitehaven

IF YOU WERE ASKED TO SUMMON UP IMAGES of the coastline of England and Wales, you might think of sunny days, buckets and spades, and carefree holidays. But for many young people growing up by the sea, decades of evidence tell a very different story. For them, rather than a picture-perfect horizon full of hope, the sea has become a boundary that swallows up opportunity.

With a 73% decline in funding for youth services in England over the past 12 years, and a lack of opportunities that has led to nearly 1 million 16- to 24-year-olds not in work, education or training (Neet), the situation for young people, especially in places of deprivation, has never seemed more desperate.

On our journey around the coast we saw this first-hand - young people who had become isolated and despondent. For decades, they have taken the blame, with countless media articles describing them as "lazy" or "feral", and their towns as "scum".

We wanted to shine a light on the positive things that are being created by and for young people on the coast to highlight just what it is we cannot afford to lose.

We also wanted to hold accountable all the adults who have made, or allowed, the policies that stripped back the services that supported young people.

Here are some of the key things we learned along the way.

Eleanor, 23

Morecambe, Lancashire

'I think if people just chatted to the young people here and welcomed them to more decision-making events, it would make this a much better place'

A failure to tackle England's "coastal problem" has plagued governments for decades. Data released last year found that nine out of 10 of the most deprived neighbourhoods in England were coastal (seven were in Blackpool, Lancashire; one in Hastings, East Sussex; and one in Tendring, Essex). The most deprived small area in Wales was in Rhyl. Yet everywhere we went there was the sense that coastal communities were not being taken seriously.

Ben Cooper, who wrote a report for the Fabian Society four years ago urging Labour to focus on the coast, echoes that sentiment. He warns that MPs need to "show that they want them [coastal communities] and everyone in those places to succeed. There is a feeling of disconnect in many of these places. It is not enough to just have good policy."

With that in mind, we connected young people from coastal places via workshops where they created their own images of their towns. These were made into postcards that they sent to one another, setting up an exchange along the coast. Some of these are being shown as part of a touring Against the tide exhibition, now on at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery, while others will be displayed at Blackpool North train station for the next 10 years. We also took 16 young people from eight coastal places in England to parliament to give evidence about their lives to MPs in the all-party parliamentary group (APPG) for coastal communities.

Polly Billington, the Labour MP for East Thanet and chair of the newly reformed coastal parliamentary Labour party (PLP), chaired the session. "I think that one of the most radical things we can do at the moment, because of the levels of isolation that people are experiencing, is to bring them together," she says. "This was a brilliant way of giving young people the opportunity to understand what they've got in common."

Eighteen-year-old Francesca, from Blackpool, wants those in power to do more than just listen, however. "Having debates and public speaking is good for young people, so we should keep doing events," she says. "But we can also do events where [those in charge] take on board our plans. We do actually have plans, you know!"

Since the APPG forum, the Coastal Navigators Network (CNN), which helped put the event together, has taken forward one of the ideas suggested by 26-year-old Courtney from Felixstowe. It has committed to establishing a Young People on the Coast Action Network to try to involve younger people more closely in creating opportunities.

Annalise, 18

Whitehaven, Cumbria

'I sent out a form to the other young people in my town and one thing I asked was: "Do you think you have the same opportunities as other young people elsewhere?" The answers were all: "No"'

Employment was a consistent theme along the coast, where opportunities for young people are often halved, largely due to the presence of the sea in one direction.

Many of those we spoke to would like better, earlier information about ways into work, including fairly basic things such as communicating information through channels they use, like social media. In particular, many mentioned the need for help with work experience. The evidence suggests this is very hard to find outside well-connected families and especially for those with a limited number of employers to turn to.

The government has committed to helping young adults who have not been in work or education long term to get work experience, though the first phase does not appear to cover coastal areas in England. Where there are job or educational opportunities, young people need to be able to reach them. "There should be more means testing to allow those from poorer families to keep hold of a bus pass, not just up until when you're 18 and in college, but after that, so that you can get a job elsewhere and do other things," says 23-year-old Archie from Weston-super-Mare in Somerset.

Since the start of the Against the tide series a year ago, there has already been a welcome government policy impetus aimed at young people, including the first national youth strategy in 15 years.

One of the initiatives with the most potential for change is the rollout of young futures hubs designed to give young people support on things such as employment and health and wellbeing (comparable to the Sure Start early years service, but for teenagers and young adults). At the moment, it is unclear how many of these will be on the coast (the initial rollout only includes Brighton and Hove) and, slightly confusingly, these will sit alongside existing youth hubs from the Department for Work and Pensions.

Avril Keating, professor of youth studies at University College London's Institute of Education, whose research helped inform the Guardian's work, sums up the problem. "There are so many people and different government departments responsible for delivering objectives for the coast. The question now is: who is joining that up to make sure there is a strategy in place?"

That is something Billington, the East Thanet MP, has talked about a lot over the past year. She is pushing not only for a coastal communities minister at cabinet level, to make sure the coast is central to any conversation about change, but she also wants the government to agree to establish the coast as a "special economic zone". The area within 5km of the shore, she says, should have its own economic rules that would help support growth sectors.

"We need to start talking about what our opportunities and potential are," she says. "We shouldn't be seen as places that are too difficult to develop and grow."

Against the tide
Read more from this year-long project from the Guardian's Seascape series reporting on the lives of young people in coastal communities across England and Wales

Tom
Ramsgate

Tom, 16

Ramsgate, Kent

'I do think things like a lack of transport and not having enough social spaces for people to interact with other young people does take a toll on your mental health'

We started our series with a story that revealed the poor state of mental health of young people in coastal places as compared with their peers in equivalent places of deprivation inland.

It was a stark reminder of the wider health crisis on the coast, so well documented by the then chief medical officer, Chris Whitty, in a seminal report in 2021, and how that has affected a largely undocumented group on the coast: the young.

Lord Kamlesh Patel of Bradford chairs the CNN, set up after Whitty's report to develop practical responses to coastal challenges with relatively modest funding and a focus on locally led solutions. It is working in 19 of the most deprived places.

One of these is Fleetwood, a disadvantaged coastal town in Lancashire, where the group has redesigned children and young people's mental health support around early intervention and seen a 54% reduction in referrals to child and adolescent mental health services (Camhs) and a similar reduction in children attending A&E.

"We don't need more research or more evidence on this [the coastal problem]," he says. "We just need practical projects led by local people created within a system that listens to them and links them together."

Patel is frustrated that the government is not learning from successes such as these by putting in place the funding and structure that would enable them to be replicated more easily elsewhere.

"There's a massive advantage in planning for healthy ageing early," he says. "Those 16- to 24-year-olds now will become the more expensive, complex cases of unhealthy ageing later if we don't act. You concentrate on the coast and go in there first because it's most acute there. But there are priority locations across the country, and the ambition should be to roll out this approach across all of those."

There is also huge potential for the new youth hubs to help break the cycle between being not in education, employment or training (Neet) and having poor mental health. As the authors of a new report for the Centre for Young Lives point out, however, the hubs are set up to deliver "wellbeing support", which is distinctly different from mental health provision. "If provision is limited to signposting, this may simply transfer additional pressure on to already overstretched children and young people's mental health services, particularly for young people with more complex needs – rather than providing the support needed," they say.

Orson, 18

Blackpool, Lancashire

'It can be quite hard here because the town is more of a tourist attraction, so there's not a lot. But I feel like when I am inspired through dance it lights a spark in me. It's like an escapism from the realities of other things in life'

Orson attends the dance and arts company House of Wingz. Such is its success that last year three of the 30 dancers selected nationwide for the National Youth Dance Company (NYDC) were from House of Wingz, and two more got through this year.

When we first met Orson, House of Wingz was facing an uncertain future, with no guarantee of funding to keep it going. Thankfully that changed at the end of January when it was given a lottery grant, allowing it to stay open for another five years.

Aishley Bell-Docherty, the creative director and co-founder of the company, describes the "massive relief" at having that certainty until 2031. "We've always done what we've done in spite of lack of money," she says. "The NYDC programme that Orson is in … three of them got into that national programme in spite of what we don't have in [this town]. We've all got massive aspirations for Blackpool."

A significant part of the government's youth strategy is an investment in 250 youth clubs, which it announced during the time we were reporting for Against the tide. But the fact that time is running out was underlined when we came across Pie Factory Music, the last remaining youth centre in Thanet, one of the most deprived coastal areas in England, which was fighting Kent county council to remain open.

This fear over funding was a common story around the coast among youth groups, many of them based around music, dance and theatre.

Emily Murray, director of Essex University's centre for coastal communities, provided the research about young people's mental health that started our series.

"Something that comes up time and time again is that youth groups are constantly getting small time-limited funding pots to do projects that make a difference," she says. "And then the money's gone. What they need is long-term guaranteed funding. Just imagine what they could get done if they didn't have to spend all this time and energy applying for money over and over again."

The danger of not investing in health, jobs, education, transport and youth spaces on the coast is that it forces young people to leave. Even if some return when they are older, that is not an outcome that many we met wanted.

"What happens to a place is that it misses out on the energy and potential of those people," says Keating. "We should be focused on wanting to keep people when they are young." ●

LISA BACHELOR IS EDITOR OF SEASCAPE, A SERIES ABOUT THE STATE OF OUR OCEANS; POLLY BRADEN IS A DOCUMENTARY PHOTOGRAPHER

Additional reporting by Antonia Shipley

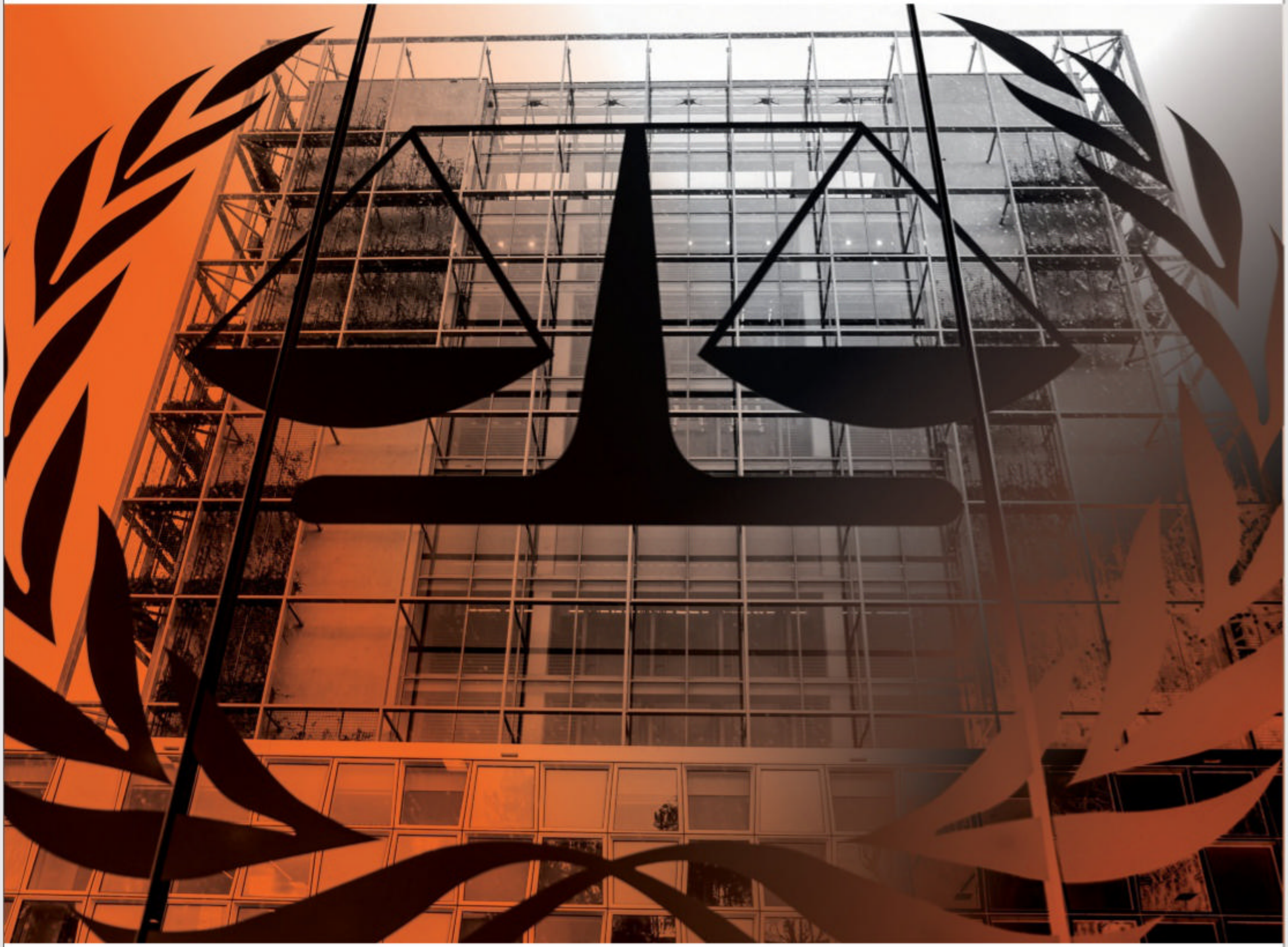
The Against the tide series is a collaboration between the Guardian and Polly Braden, who will be giving a talk about the project alongside Lisa Bachelor at Bristol's Arnolfini gallery on 25 September

COCO KHAN

Master Poulet and a lesson in gentrification

Page 47 →

Opinion



INTERNATIONAL LAW

Trump says he'll dismantle the ICC. It could be his most chilling move

Steve Bloomfield

▲ The ICC headquarters in The Hague, Netherlands

MIKE CORDER/AP

Barely a month appears to go by without Donald Trump making a fresh attempt to destroy the international rules-based order. The US has pulled funding from dozens of international institutions, shut down USAID and withdrawn from the Paris climate agreement. Nato may survive on paper, but Trump has made clear that he has little interest in coming to the aid of any ally that is attacked. The Board of Peace is clearly an attempt to sideline the United Nations.

But the state department's announcement earlier this month that it wishes to dismantle the international criminal court (ICC) "brick by brick" could be Trump's most frightening move of all. It is now official US policy to destroy the ICC, and the administration is prepared to go to extraordinary lengths to do so.

Nations that do not fall into line will be punished. The state department has promised "increased scrutiny of nations that refuse to reject the ICC's false authority while relying on US assistance", targeting countries that "enjoy the benefits of the US security umbrella". That will include the UK, a country that contributes the equivalent of $20m a year to the ICC, making it the fourth largest donor after Japan, Germany and France.

Travel and sanctions bans have already been imposed on judges and senior officials. As one of those previously threatened with sanctions told me, it can result in people being completely cut off from modern life. Personal bank accounts are shut down while a whole host of US apps and websites, from Uber to booking.com, are off limits. Email accounts can be blocked - Microsoft and Google are US companies. For the court itself, it means backing up evidence previously held on Microsoft systems.

The state department campaign includes working with nations that are not part of the ICC, suggesting that the US could ally itself with Russia and China.

Make no mistake, this is an existential crisis not just for the ICC but the very idea of international justice. The most powerful nation on Earth and the supposed leader of the democratic west is aligning itself with dictators and autocrats to prevent those accused of genocide, ethnic cleansing and war crimes from ever facing justice.

The US has a complicated history with international justice. The issue was one of self-preservation rather than principle. For generations of US politicians, mainly Republicans, the idea that judges in other countries could hold US citizens to account was a non-starter, but presidents accepted the idea of international justice.

> “
> *The ICC's very existence can have an impact - Netanyahu and Putin are referred to as men indicted for war crimes*

The US refused to sign the Rome statute that created the ICC in 2002. In 2005, it allowed the UN security council to pass a resolution authorising the ICC to investigate, and prosecute, those accused of war crimes in Sudan. It encouraged the ICC to prosecute Vladimir Putin for alleged war crimes committed in Ukraine.

For Trump, though, the ICC has always been a threat. He imposed sanctions on court officials during his first term after an investigation into alleged war crimes committed by US troops in Afghanistan.

The campaign against the court ratcheted up after his return to office last year. The ICC's now ousted chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, had issued an arrest warrant for Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, accusing him of committing war crimes in Gaza. In response, Trump imposed fresh sanctions on ICC officials including Khan.

The threats to the ICC are not just coming from its enemies - many of them are self-inflicted. Two women, one a staffer at the ICC, accused Khan of sexual abuse. The executive committee of the ICC's governing body voted last week to remove Khan, who denies any wrongdoing, after concluding last month that he had committed serious misconduct.

Staff in The Hague say the ICC has become an increasingly high-pressure place to work, with one former senior official describing the atmosphere as toxic.

There are also concerns from international law and human rights experts over its record. It has botched many of its big cases. The question now is what the "rest of the west" will do in response to Trump's attacks. The court's biggest donors need to stay strong and not give in to intimidation. It will be an early test for the UK foreign secretary, Ed Miliband, who said that "we face a time of greater instability and threat to international law ... than at any time since the second world war".

Yet the ICC's very existence can have an impact. Netanyahu and Putin will for ever be referred to as men indicted for war crimes. Their worlds have shrunk thanks to the threat of arrest. The Philippines' former president Rodrigo Duterte is currently on trial, accused of crimes against humanity during his "war on drugs".

This is why Trump is so determined to shut it down, argues Luis Moreno Ocampo, the court's first chief prosecutor. "Trump knows he could be a target after he leaves office," he told me. "The ICC is a huge obstacle for him."

✻ **Steve Bloomfield** *is the former international editor of the Observer*

That's another reason why it's so important the ICC is saved. After the midterm elections, a Democrat-led Congress is likely to hold hearings and open investigations into a whole host of Trump's actions.

But the rest of the world needs to hold him accountable too - whether it's for bombing boats in the Caribbean, striking a school in Iran or indeed any fresh horror he commits in the next two and a half years. Just as Putin and Netanyahu will live out the rest of their days knowing the threat of arrest could lie just around the corner, Trump fears this might be his fate. He cannot be allowed to escape it ●

FRANCE

Am I a chicken shop lefty? What a fast food row says about politics

Coco Khan

ILLUSTRATION: GUARDIAN DESIGN; RICHARD CLARK/GETTY

How do you like your progressive politics? Are you net-zero left or anti-identity politics left? A "legalising drugs" kind of radical or someone whose public sector solidarity includes police? Nato or Nat-no? The reputation for infighting in lefty spaces – where policy disagreements harden into personal tests of morality – needs neither introduction nor encouragement.

But reading about the left-on-left battle at Master Poulet, a French chicken chain that just opened its first UK branch, I found myself mulling a question that felt more than a little personal: am I chicken shop left?

OK, OK, maybe it's personal: chicken shops, offering cheap halal takes on mainstream fare, have long been a pursuit of south Asian immigrants who hoped, like my own family, for a better life in this brave new world (talk about a wing and a prayer). But they are also bound up in Black British youth culture: neighbourhood incubators for music, affordable places to hang, landmarks of "the ends". Chicken shops tell the story of a mixed, working-class Britain, with all its whimsy.

There's Morris Cassanova, AKA "Mr Chicken", the late graphic designer who claimed to have designed 90% of the chicken shop signs in London. Or just the sheer nerve of the Americana. I still chuckle whenever I pass a Dixy Chicken, imagining what the Confederate south might think of a halal business from Solihull bearing its name. Add the peri boom, Amelia Dimoldenberg's hit YouTube channel Chicken Shop Date and Rishi Sunak discussing his Nando's order ("It's good broccoli," he said), and the chicken shop's modern cultural legacy is something to crow about.

Anyway, back to the boeuf – sorry, I mean poulet – in France. Back in April, Karim Bouamrane, the Socialist party (PS) mayor of Saint-Ouen-sur-Seine, near Paris, tried to block a Master Poulet branch that had opened outside the town hall. Literally – with concrete blocks at the doors. A court ordered them removed, so he swapped them for giant colourful plant pots. The shop responded with quippy signs ("We are open … no offence to Karim," read one), delighting French social media with this meta game of chicken. Bouamrane insisted it was all about quality of life, as late deliveries and cooking smells disturbed residents. Not everyone was convinced.

Saint-Ouen has transformed in recent years, not least due to regeneration pegged to the Paris Olympics. Critics accuse the mayor of overseeing a gentrification drive that has seen property prices surge, arguing that's his real issue: he wants to chase out cheap food (and the sorts of people who eat it). Master Poulet serves a drumstick of rotisserie chicken and potatoes for €4 ($4.50) – cheaper than a McDonald's and probably no less healthy, yet McDonald's is not a target. And given the tradition of rotisserie chicken in France, you do have to ask what it is about the halal version that prompts complaints about bad odours.

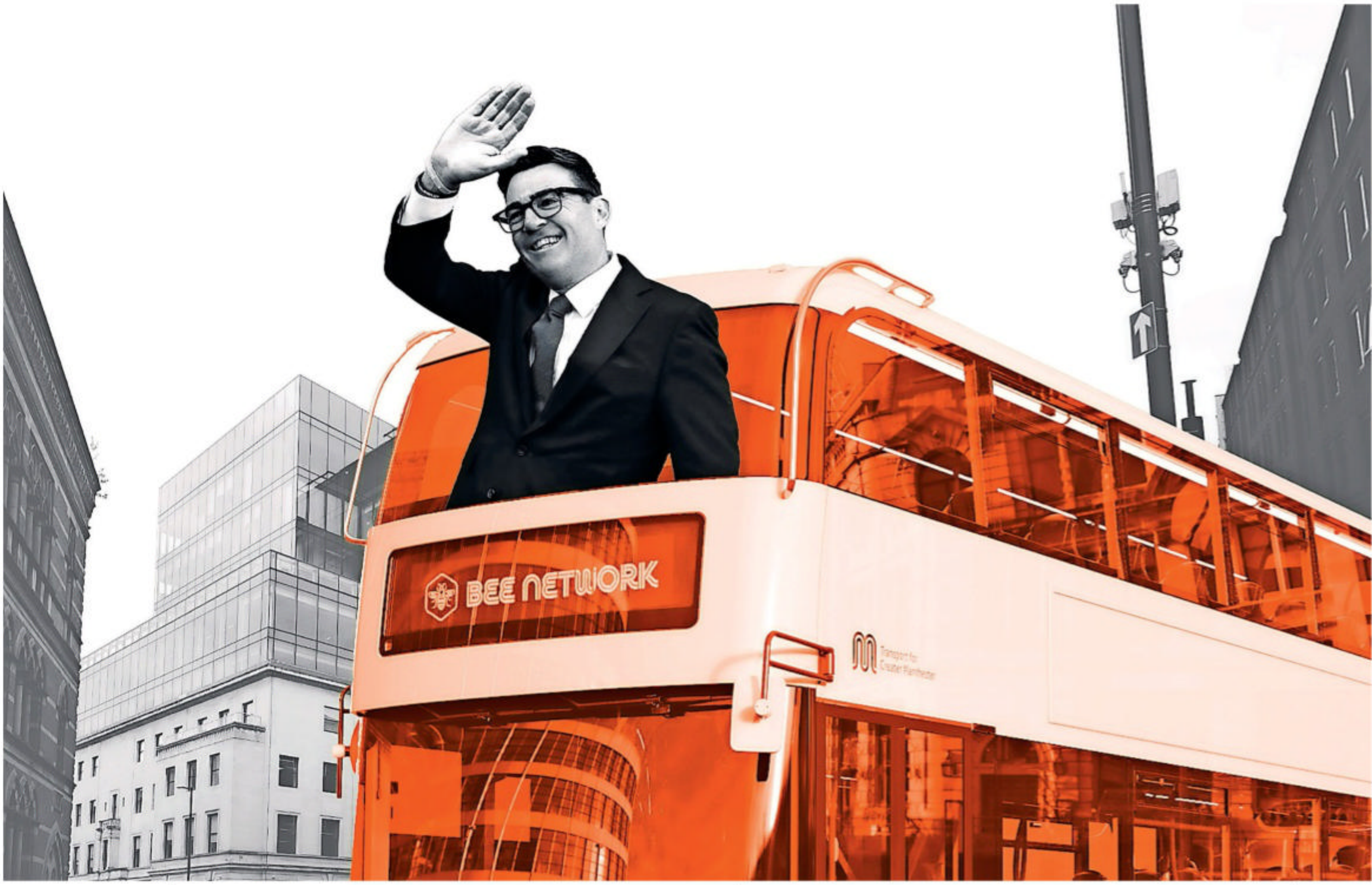
✻ **Coco Khan** *is a writer and co-host of the politics podcast Pod Save the UK*

Which may explain why politicians from the further-left La France Insoumise (LFI) have waded in, questioning whether Islamophobia and classism are at play, and accusing the mayor of abusing his power. One MP visited the shop in solidarity. His name? Éric Coquerel. I'll just leave that there.

To be clear, I am far from an expert on French politics. The last time I thought much about the LFI and PS was in 2024, when they joined forces in the Nouveau Front Populaire (NFP) to hold back Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally. It worked, prompting many of us in the UK to ask, with Nigel Farage tipped for No 10: shouldn't we – red, green, yellow or bin – be doing the same?

Bouamrane announced last month he would be running for president. But as I pecked at pommes frites on a warm London evening, it was hard to see how that successful arrangement of NFP could happen again. Bouamrane has since called LFI a colonialist party for undermining French republicanism with its talk of race, while allegations of racism from LFI continue. Meanwhile, opinion polls put Le Pen on track for presidential glory. What leaves me crestfallen (at this point the puns are involuntary) isn't the disagreement but what it heralds.

So am I part of the chicken shop left? I don't know, maybe. But perhaps that's the wrong question. After the almighty flap over Master Poulet, I'm left feeling that politics should be less "ruling the roost" and more "birds of a feather". Especially with a far-right fox prowling outside the henhouse ●



GUARDIAN DESIGN/
GETTY/PA/TFGM

UNITED
KINGDOM

You may scoff at cheap bus fares, but Burnham knows what he's doing

Jonathan Freedland

One of Andy Burnham's first policy moves brought back a sharp memory. Last Wednesday, he announced that single bus fares across England would be capped at £2 ($2.60). It was part of a series of small, practical measures designed, said the new prime minister, to offer a little "breathing space" to a hard-pressed public, but this was the one that registered with me most. That's because it echoed the first time I ever experienced a specific public policy that I realised affected me directly.

It was in the autumn of 1981 when the newly elected Greater London Council, led by Labour's Ken Livingstone, slashed bus fares in the city. The headline-grabber was a new, short-hop fare of only 10p. I was 14 years old, so for me it was even better: all child tickets were reduced to 5p. They called the scheme Fares Fair.

It became a legal and political battle - Margaret Thatcher's government objected to the extra local tax levied on Londoners to pay for it - and eventually Fares Fair was declared illegal and shut down. But Fares Fair had what no one at the time called cut through. It was a simple, clear offer to voters that had a direct, positive impact on their lives, one they would remember long after bigger, grander strategies had been lost to oblivion. It worked because politics is in part a retail business.

Burnham's first week as PM and his tenure as mayor of Greater Manchester suggest he understands that very well. Yes, there can be grand talk of ending a 40-year model of political centralisation and economic privatisation, but you also need to do something for voters that is immediate, tangible and uncomplicated. Everyone understands a lower energy bill or, indeed, a cheaper bus fare. Kemi Badenoch's response was unintentionally revealing. They were too unambitious, the Conservative leader said, amounting to "small answers to big problems". As she put it: "He is not the mayor of Manchester. These are mayor of Manchester ideas. Where is our prime minister?"

Obviously it's daft to deliver a verdict on an administration a few days old, not least when Burnham has said that bigger decisions are coming, including a 10-year plan for the country to be unveiled in the autumn. But the language of Badenoch's dismissal was telling.

She associates such things with the municipal realm and therefore sees them as insufficient and unserious: they are mere "mayor of Manchester ideas". It's true that municipal leaders often do retail well. Several of them made their name that way - think Rudy Giuliani, before his disgrace, and his "broken windows" policing strategy that cracked down on relatively minor offences. That's in the nature of a local politician's job. They're closer to the ground, able to improve voters' immediate circumstances directly. But Badenoch is wrong to see that as a weakness - for a politician, it's a strength.

For national leaders, there are two possible responses. One option is to think retail, even when operating on the largest scale. Harold Wilson named as his greatest achievement the Open University, a simple idea that made higher education available to those who'd been denied it. Thatcher defined an era by allowing council house tenants the right to buy their home. Or consider the ultimate retail offer - the guarantee of free medical care - in the form of what went on to become Britain's most cherished institution, the National Health Service.

The other option is for a government not to emulate the municipal so much as to empower it. This seems to be the animating project of Burnham's government, embodied by his No 10 North plan to decentralise the running of the country.

The core belief is that devolution is Britain's best shot at achieving economic growth. A new paper from the Harvard Kennedy School and King's College London argues that Britain's national productivity problem is a function of its "persistent regional productivity problem", with the divide between the south-east and the rest leading to "productivity gaps wider than between east and west Germany".

✻ **Jonathan Freedland** *is a Guardian columnist*

It argues that Keir Starmer's government talked a good game on devolution but didn't match words with deeds. The Harvard-King's team did 95 hour-long interviews, including with 10 former prime ministers or chancellors, and found not only a Whitehall machine reluctant to let go but also politicians failing to act boldly enough early enough. John Major, Tony Blair and George Osborne all spoke of their regret that they did not push regional growth from the start. This time, it could be different. At long last there is a devolution true believer in No 10 and allies in both No 11 and the key Whitehall department. As the report puts it, the combination of Burnham, John Healey and Angela Rayner makes this "the best moment we have ever had on this agenda".

A rebalancing of British power is shaping up to be the big-ticket item of the Burnham government. If it works, it will unleash myriad policy moves as yet unimagined across the country, bringing the growth that is the prerequisite for all else. And who knows, it might even improve the life of a teenager somehow and somewhere - one who will never forget it ●

The Guardian View
Founded 1821 *Independently owned by the Scott Trust*

The US's double-standards deal with Riyadh has just wrought further damage

Even as he threatened to escalate an unlawful war sold in part as preventing Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon, Donald Trump opened the door to proliferation in the region last week. The US announced that it had signed a deal with Saudi Arabia that would potentially allow the kingdom to enrich uranium and avoid the fullest inspection rights for the international watchdog.

Experts have long warned that a civilian nuclear programme could create a path towards a nuclear-armed Riyadh. Mohammed bin Salman, the Saudi crown prince and de facto leader, has said that if Tehran gets a nuclear weapon, "we will have to get one". Washington previously argued that the "gold standard" was the United Arab Emirates' agreement to permanently forgo enrichment and accept full monitoring by the UN's International Atomic Energy Agency. Weakening it sets a precedent that Russia or China could also cite in nuclear deals.

The turmoil that Mr Trump has created in the Middle East is encouraging governments to hedge their bets and to tool up. The US paused attacks on Iran last weekend amid reports that it is concerned about declining interceptor stockpiles, but no exit is in sight. As António Guterres, the UN secretary general, said, the region "is teetering on the edge of [the] unimaginable".

Gulf states premised their security on US-guaranteed order. But Benjamin Netanyahu's strike on Hamas leaders in Qatar last year showed that the US shield would not protect them from Israel (itself an undeclared nuclear power). The reckless war on Iran has made US military presence an invitation to damage. Washington may be looking to bind Riyadh closer with a reactor deal, though the billions of dollars involved is probably a bigger incentive for Mr Trump. The crumbling of the region's internal architecture adds to the dangers of proliferation.

The US president threw the Saudi deal into doubt within hours by declaring it contingent on Riyadh recognising Israel. That had long been a precondition for an agreement, but Israel's war in Gaza has shored up the Saudi position that recognition cannot happen without a Palestinian state. Yet the announcement acts as legitimation of the pursuit of nuclear capabilities by others. Negotiations produced an Obama-era nuclear deal - until Mr Trump trashed the agreement. His war appears to have produced a more aggressive, risk-taking Iranian regime; further military action is more likely to spur than end nuclear threat.

The last US-Russia nuclear arms control treaty expired in February. China is expanding its arsenal. Asian and European states which counted on the US nuclear umbrella are discussing acquiring or enhancing their own capabilities. Most understand that diplomacy, multilateralism and global standards are a better choice than a race for the bomb. Mr Trump does not believe in international institutions. But upholding existing nuclear safeguards would be in US interests too as we enter a new age of proliferation ●

WRITE TO US

Letters for publication
weekly.letters@theguardian.com
–
Please include a full postal address and a reference to the article.
We may edit letters. Submission and publication of all letters is subject to our terms and conditions, see:
THEGUARDIAN.COM/LETTERS-TERMS

Editorial
Editor: Graham Snowdon

To contact the editor directly:
editorial.feedback@theguardian.com

Corrections
Our policy is to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please write to guardian.readers@theguardian.com or the readers' editor, Kings Place, 90 York Way, London N1 9GU, UK

Hope for Burnham but hard truths lie ahead

As a former Labour member who resigned this year following the announcement of reforms to refugee status, I felt Andy Burnham's Labour leadership speech was inspiring and full of hope (What did we learn from new PM Burnham's speech?, Spotlight, 24 July). I noted that the speech didn't provide any deep insight into his foreign policy thinking.

Keir Starmer's two-year reign has improved EU relationships, played a key role in shaping Europe's policy towards Ukraine and improved trade agreements with several nations. Mr Burnham and the new foreign secretary need to focus on these three critical issues.

Ukrainian citizens, the EU and the UK need to know the war is not placed on a lower level of priority by the UK government given Burnham's overflowing in-tray.

Paresh Motla
Thame, England, UK

● After a decade and more of miserableness, bleakness and being told I have to face hard truths, what I want from Andy Burnham is simple. I want to wake up tomorrow with a sense of optimism and a spring in my step, knowing that things are finally going to get better.

Mike Storey
Peterborough, England, UK

● I read Polly Toynbee's column (Ambition, ideas and daring got Burnham to No 10. Can he deliver?, Opinion, 24 July), and things are looking favourable with his charismatic and disarming personality.

I agree that the hostility to Keir Starmer was not wholly deserved. He could not read a room, whereas Burnham will come over authentically. There will indeed be tough times ahead but this is a politician who has longed for this role. I am hoping that he will make a good fist of it.

Judith A Daniels
Gt Yarmouth, England, UK

● With Keir Starmer now joining eight former prime ministers, and therefore eligible to receive up to £115,000 ($150,000) a year, it is surely time to publish details of how they interpret the public duty costs allowance and what the money is spent on.

Les Bright
Exeter, England, UK

Funding for bird research offers us high hopes

How reassuring it is to discover that, at a time when climate change denial and cuts to foreign aid figure prominently in US policy, funds can be found for a researcher to spend 10 years decoding the chirps of zebra finches (Scientist wins $100,000 prize for decoding bird song, science and environment, 3 July). Let's hope the finches can warn us when it's time to head for the ark.

Roderick MacFarquhar
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK

Dowling hits the nail on the head on DIY realities

Tim Dowling (I do have some principles. One is to avoid DIY at all costs, Lifestyle, 17 July) would have found a kindred spirit in my father, who always said: "DIY means don't involve yourself."

Jane Imrie
Collingham, England, UK

● In our household, DIY equates to "Destroy it yourself".

Pat Begg
Stockport, England, UK

Under Trump, the US is no longer a reliable ally

Ben Doherty is spot on: Australians are generally horrified by Trump's America and the ugly values it espouses (America at 250, Big story, 10 July).

The biggest problem this poses for us is what to do about Aukus. Most of us feel that with an unstable, unreliable, treacherous leading US ally in that alliance who needs enemies. So we yearn for the return of a stable civilised US administration to befriend us once again before too much damage is done to our American relationship.

Terry Hewton,
Adelaide, South Australia

Reform councillors find meeting too hot to handle

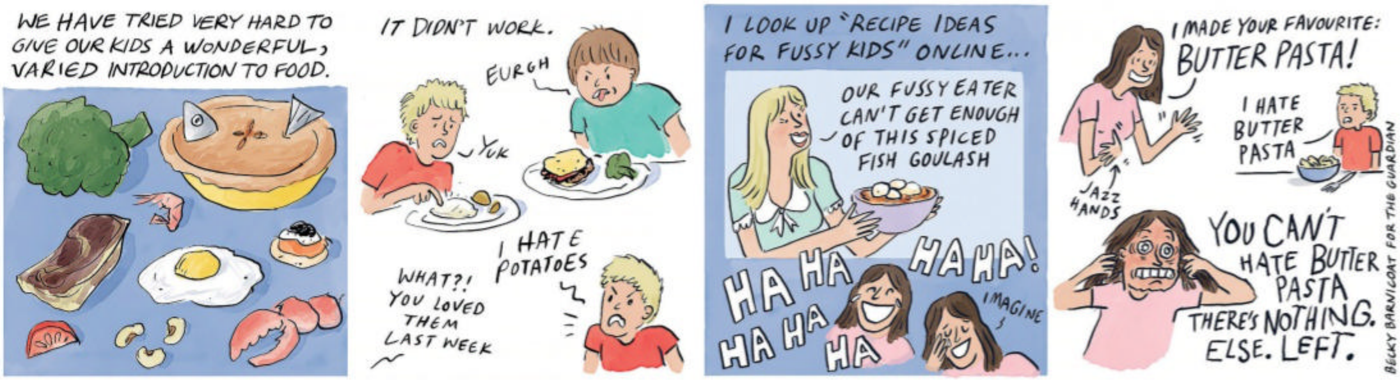
In King's Lynn and West Norfolk, a meeting where Reform UK councillors planned to scrap a climate emergency declaration was postponed - because of the UK heatwave. The irony is delicious (A hot mess, Big story, 3 July).

Rev Simon Wilson
South Wootton,
England, UK

CORRECTIONS

Ben Shepherd works for the NSW Rural Fire Service, not Fire and Rescue NSW (Full blaze, Big story, 24 July)

BECKY BARNICOAT ON MILLENNIAL LIFE


WE HAVE TRIED VERY HARD TO GIVE OUR KIDS A WONDERFUL, VARIED INTRODUCTION TO FOOD.
IT DIDN'T WORK.
EURGH
YUK
I HATE POTATOES
WHAT?! YOU LOVED THEM LAST WEEK
I LOOK UP "RECIPE IDEAS FOR FUSSY KIDS" ONLINE...
OUR FUSSY EATER CAN'T GET ENOUGH OF THIS SPICED FISH GOULASH
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA!
IMAGINE
I MADE YOUR FAVOURITE: BUTTER PASTA!
JAZZ HANDS
I HATE BUTTER PASTA
YOU CAN'T HATE BUTTER PASTA THERE'S NOTHING. ELSE. LEFT.
BECKY BARNICOAT FOR THE GUARDIAN

MUSIC

Organ revival as pipes call a new generation

Page 54 →

Culture

John Carpenter's horror and sci-fi movies often carry a rebellious streak and his killer soundtracks. Ahead of a new album, he talks creativity and compromise

Reel terms

INTERVIEW
By Steve Rose
PORTRAITS
By Philip Cheung

IN 2024, JOHN CARPENTER HAD A DREAM that sounds like one of his movies: it involved a portal to the underworld beneath a disused church, monstrous demons and people being turned inside out. "I woke up and thought: wow! What an elaborate story," he says. "I rarely have cinematic dreams, but this was one of them." He has turned it into a graphic novel, Cathedral, with an accompanying soundtrack. "It seemed to fit this heavy metal groove that we were starting on, and it worked out pretty well."

Most people would consider this a nightmare rather than a dream, I suggest. "No. Nightmares, for me, are personal - something that happened to me," he replies. "Usually my nightmares are, I'm directing a movie and no one will listen to me. No one will follow my directions. Seriously, that's what I wake up from."

It doesn't take a Freudian analyst to unpack that one. Carpenter's film career effectively wound down at the end of the 20th century, after 25 years of making movies his own way - often tense, terrifying, violent, gory movies. He is the epitome of the stubbornly independent film-maker, who demands complete creative control and whose name above the title is a seal of cult quality. "'Don't tell me what to do' is John Carpenter's credo!" he tells me. Few of his movies were commercial hits at the time, including his final two movies, 2001's Ghosts of Mars and 2010's The Ward.

Does he miss making movies? "Yes and no," he says. We are talking on a video call from his home in the Hollywood Hills and, despite his reputation as an uncompromising grouch, the 78-year-old is in good spirits and good health. "It's really weird. Yes, because I've always loved cinema and the process. But no, working in the studio system in Hollywood is very difficult."

He seems to have managed pretty well, I suggest. "You have to fight to do that. That's the unfortunate thing. And that takes a little bit out of you, as a person," he says. "There's a reason why directors come out of the other end looking as if they've been in a war. Because they have been: it's a creative war."

Carpenter may have lost battles, but he won the war. Many of his films are considered classics: Halloween, The Thing, Assault on Precinct 13, The Fog, Escape from New York. And his film-making style continues to cast a long shadow - not only over horror and sci-fi movies, but also mainstream television, especially anything set in the 80s or with the look of that era. Musicians also bow to him: his spare, synth-driven scores have been namechecked by many, from Portishead to Daft Punk, Trent Reznor to Hans Zimmer.

> **"*Working in the studio system in Hollywood is difficult. It takes a little bit out of you, as a person***

When I tell him there is almost a paragraph of his Wikipedia entry listing film-makers who have cited him as an influence, he seems genuinely oblivious. "It's wonderful, I think it's fantastic, I don't know why. If you were gonna emulate a director, you'd emulate somebody whose movies aren't panned." It sounds as if he is not online much then? "No! I rebelled against mobile phones. I rebelled against computers. I don't want to do that."

Carpenter's rebellious streak goes way back, and is inseparable from his art. His father was a music teacher and an orchestra violinist. In 1953, when John was five, the family relocated from northern New York when his dad got a teaching job at Western Kentucky University. "It was the Jim Crow south in the 1950s. Boy, were we fish out of water," Carpenter says. "Everything I know about evil I learned in that small town of Bowling Green, Kentucky."

His father had encouraged John to learn violin too. "You're walking to school in the morning and you have a violin under your arm; these country boys in Kentucky decided I was great to beat up. I was a mark for violence with my violin, which made me hate it all the more."

Carpenter was also just the right age to hook into the 60s counterculture. He rebelled against everything, he says: the town he grew up in, the Vietnam war, the system, "all forms of authority". But he came to love and appreciate his father. "He told me early on: just create something, whether it's music, writing, painting; whatever it is, create. And here I am, still doing it."

His mother regularly took him to the movies. "She gave me the gift of fantasy, and my father gave me a rigorous approach to creating." Seeing the sci-fi movie Forbidden Planet when he was eight was a transformative experience: "I remember walking out and thinking: I'm gonna be a movie director."

While near-contemporaries such as Francis Ford Coppola and Martin Scorsese were taking over Hollywood through the front door, Carpenter operated on the genre sidelines. His 1974 debut, Dark Star, was a lo-fi hippy parody of Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey. It was made on a shoestring, but did reasonably well, alerting Hollywood to the fact he could produce results on a small budget.

IT ALL CAME TOGETHER WITH HALLOWEEN, in 1978. Led by a then unknown Jamie Lee Curtis and made for $325,000, it grossed over $70m. It opened the floodgates for highly profitable low-budget horror films and is often cited as the foundational slasher movie. Carpenter makes no such claims. "I wanted to use the audience, manipulate them like a ride at a carnival and have them scream, jump, not knowing where the thing is."

Halloween was an assault on cosy smalltown domesticity: the horror wasn't confined to a haunted house; it was in your home, preying on you and your children.

Inevitably, the studio wanted a sequel. "I didn't think there was any story left," Carpenter says. "But they – meaning Universal Pictures and the producers – were gonna do it whether I wanted to or not. So what are you gonna do?" He wrote, but did not direct, Halloween 2, and after that: "They took it out of my hands, but they had to pay me every time they made a movie."

Carpenter continued to stick it to the man, puncturing his era's cheery certainties and self-congratulation, ridiculing authority figures, standing up for the underclass.

◀ **Slash and grab** Jamie Lee Curtis in Hollywood success Halloween

ALLSTAR/FALCON INTERNATIONAL/ KIM GOTTLIEB

He was possibly most out of step with American sensibilities in the summer of 1982, when he released The Thing – a paranoid sci-fi thriller centred on a shape-shifting alien picking off members of an Antarctic research station. It is now recognised as a horror masterpiece. It arrived in cinemas two weeks after Steven Spielberg's ET the Extra-Terrestrial. The contrast could not have been more jarring.

Carpenter is full of admiration for Spielberg, not least for reading the 80s zeitgeist. But he prefers his version: "If you really want to know the truth about alien encounters, I think that my movies are more realistic about what will happen. Think of the settlers who came to the United States and their encounters with the Indians. It didn't really go so well for the Indians, OK? Our encounters with aliens – I imagine it won't go so well for us."

That said, he did make a relatively feelgood alien story: 1984's Starman, in which a visiting alien inhabits the body of Karen Allen's deceased husband, Jeff Bridges. The result was a tender, comical, road-trip romance. It showed Carpenter's surprising capacity for sensitive, emotional drama.

Then there's They Live, from 1988, which seems to have taken on a life of its own. The story concerns a homeless worker (played by wrestler "Rowdy" Roddy Piper) who discovers sunglasses that reveal subliminal propaganda beneath every advert, magazine and piece of packaging he sees: "Obey", "Marry and Reproduce", "Stay Asleep". Even dollar bills secretly say: "This is your God." The glasses also reveal the aliens who walk among us undetected, controlling humanity. Not exactly subtle, but it has become part of the culture, endlessly mimicked and turned into memes.

Carpenter was specifically targeting the Reagan era in They Live, he says, the hyperconsumerism, but also the inequality. "It's a documentary, and it didn't end. It's still going on now, even worse." He stops himself. "You'll get me ranting here, and that's not a good thing." But he's depressed by the state of his country. "Things are bad here. I guess you guys realise that over there?

"It's actually democracy under pressure from the dictator. I'm a real sucker for American values. There's a lot of people like me and we're constantly fighting, but we're doing it within the system. I vote. That's the only power I have. I'm not a rich guy like these guys. And I keep believing that we'll fight them off one day."

Of course, voting is not the only power Carpenter has; his cinema is a textbook lesson in how beliefs and values can be transmitted through popular culture. But he is happy for others to take up the fight these days. He didn't realise how much film-making was taking out of him until he stopped doing it, he says. "I was exhausted, and then I took this extended vacation and I got happier the more I was away from the thing I love. I was addicted to moviemaking and I needed rehab. So I had to get away from it."

Since then, he has toured the world playing his film music, with his son Cody and his godson, Daniel Davies, as well as recording new material. He has no regrets. "I've had a fantastic time. Now I'm playing music. I mean, it doesn't get better than this."

Most of his days are spent at a leisurely pace, he says. "Basketball, the news and video games. Then I go to have long, beautiful sleeps – and dream."

STEVE ROSE IS ASSISTANT FEATURES EDITOR FOR THE GUARDIAN

John Carpenter's new album, Cathedral, is released on 7 August

▲ **Carpenter cuts** 1981's dystopian Escape From New York; Kurt Russell in 1982's The Thing; Taking on consumerism in 1988's They Live; Karen Allen and Jeff Bridges in 1984's Starman

EMBASSY, COLUMBIA, SPORTSPHOTO/ALLSTAR; ALAMY; KOBAL/REX/ SHUTTERSTOCK

Pipe dreams
The organ is key for innovation

Musicians from Jonny Greenwood to Kali Malone are discovering the depth and sonic variety of the mightiest of instruments

By *Tom Service*

▲ The Royal Albert Hall's Willis organ towers over Prom-goers in London
GRAEME ROBERTSON

▶ Olivier Latry in front of the Great Organ of Notre-Dame cathedral, Paris
LUC CASTEL/GETTY

It has 9,999 pipes, it's 155 years old and 21 metres high. You can see it, but not always hear it, at every single London Prom. I'm talking of course about the Willis organ in the Royal Albert Hall, which took centre stage last weekend at a Proms recital by French organist Olivier Latry. With his mostly Bach programme, Latry's recital represented the core of the organ's repertoire, music that has been heard in cathedrals and on concert hall organs for centuries.

The world of organists can feel like a cloistered domain of inaccessible lofts, mysterious machinery and liturgical codification that resists innovation and audience connection. But that's changing for this generation, thanks to such players as Latry and to the globe-trotting advocacy of Anna Lapwood, and a generation of experimental musicians (of which more later) who are using the pipe organ as their medium of discovery and wonder.

The organ is a miraculous instrument with a millennia-long history - there were water-organs in ancient Greece. Pipe organs can be ear-shatteringly loud but they are also capable of the greatest sonic variety. Buildings such as the Royal Albert Hall were designed around their organs: the architecture was built to be their resonating chambers. Organs can sustain pitches far beyond the limits of human breaths or bowing arms; they can mimic and synthesise the sounds of the musical natural world, from abyssal rumbles that feel like glaciers calving, producing frequencies that are so low they are felt as vibration rather than heard, to the heights of birdsong and glittering sonic filigree.

In Halberstadt in Germany, John Cage's Organ^2/ASLSP (As Slow As Possible) is still near the beginning of a performance that's planned to last 639 years: it began in 2001 and is scheduled to finish in 2640, with another note change coming up on 5 August this year.

Jonny Greenwood's X Years of Reverb (where X = the number of years that an organ or performance space has been extant) is a mere eight hours, made for two organists at a single instrument, a piece written, he says, "to agitate and reanimate all the music, voices and sounds that have ever filled the air/soaked into the walls of the space where the music is played. To coax them out of the fabric of the building, so they can be distilled and concentrated into just eight hours." James McVinnie and Eliza McCarthy next play Greenwood's piece at Manchester Cathedral in January, celebrating that instrument's 605 years of reverb.

And there are many composer-organists today who are pushing the experimental bounds of the instrument. Kali Malone's obsession with it began when she was a pipe-organ tuner. The American musician has made albums that reclaim older tunings and still more ancient conceptions of cycles of musical time and turn them into breathtaking immersions of musical being. Malone has been inspired by Ellen Arkbro, another Sweden-based pioneer who uses the organ as a portal to explore arcane and elemental musical regions; while Anna von Hausswolff has made the organ the foundation of a musical language that stretches from avant-pop to experimentalism.

One more example of today's pipe-organ pioneers for you: Claire M Singer, whose albums and compositions, which are often titled after Scottish landscapes, places, and histories, are organ-scapes of slow drones and radiant horizons. Singer makes musical time move as an ecstatic, infinite moment, releasing "all the music and sounds that have ever filled the air", as Greenwood puts it - but not only, you feel, in the buildings that accommodate these instruments, but across entire mountain ranges and cosmoses.

The organ can take you to wondrous musical places.

TOM SERVICE WRITES ABOUT MUSIC FOR THE GUARDIAN

Back to black

Revenue from tribute acts is helping keep beleaguered UK venues afloat. But what is the emotional toll for the imitators, and do they push out original artists?

By *Daniel Dylan Wray*

As peak heatwave sun beams down on to a field in Derbyshire, Amy Winehouse tells the crowd she is in need of hydration - so Robbie Williams fetches her a drink. Elsewhere, members of the public stop the Beastie Boys for selfies and shirtless teenagers form a circle pit during Korn as a woman sits knitting in a camping chair just behind them. James Brown and Prince turn out to be the same artist - just dressed up in different clothes.

These are all scenes from last month's Replika festival, which won the Guinness world record for the biggest tribute festival, with 108 acts performing across a very sweaty weekend. Acts included Catfishing the Bottlemen, Pearl Scam, Wrong Jovi and Iffy Clyro.

It is far from the only event of its kind. Music venues across the country have listings crammed with tribute acts. Dave Bevan, managing director of Alive Network Entertainment Agency - which represents 234 acts - estimates that there are 3,000 to 5,000 outfits in operation in the UK.

The reason so many of these events and gigs are thriving is because going to see the original artist is often prohibitively expensive, while these gigs offer cheap access to live music, with songs you are guaranteed to know and love. James Dean of Replika, which charges £100 ($133) for a weekend ticket, says: "Our festival is targeted at low- to middle-income families that have very little disposable income. Compare that with the costs of going to Wembley Stadium for a single concert." This is echoed by a group of young lads at the festival: "It's cheap, local and a laugh."

Dan Budd, who has performed as Robbie Williams for 14 years, is full of the requisite swagger and cheekiness on stage, plus he has the same Stoke accent and even matching real tattoos. "I don't think I've ever been busier in terms of bookings," he says. "I haven't got a free Saturday night available until September 2027."

Dean tells me that the very top acts in the game will pull in £10,000-£15,000 a show. Budd says: "Put it this way: I'm 36 and mortgage free."

Similarly, Nadine l'Amour - who performs as Amy Winehouse under the name the Madnezz of Amy - is flying. She set foot on stage as Winehouse in December 2024; by April 2025 she had quit her job as a secondary school teacher to do it full time. L'Amour has replicated Winehouse's tattoos, though she is such a fan that they were done years before she got into the tribute game.

"There are 14- and 15-year-old girls singing every single word," she says of her shows. "I have young people saying: 'I never got to see Amy, but watching you on stage, I feel like that's the closest thing I'll ever get.'"

It is not just individuals such as l'Amour and Budd who are benefiting. At a time when half the UK's grassroots music venues make no profit, according to the charity Music Venue Trust (MVT), tribute artists help keep the sector afloat.

"These acts really do keep parts of the live music infrastructure moving," says Nathan Clark, owner of the Brudenell Social Club in Leeds. Despite the venue's reputation for cutting-edge newcomers and international indie stars, tribute bands play a significant role there.

There is no hard data on the precise financial impact of tribute acts. MVT's chief executive, Mark Davyd, guesses that they make up about 25-30% of bookings in independent UK venues.

One reason this huge sector is being overlooked and undocumented is because it is often seen as a bit feeble or regressive. "People, especially in the mainstream music industry, look at us as nonstarters," says Dean. "We're not really taken seriously." But tribute acts are no longer just dodgy Elvis impersonators with wayward pitch. "We've had a couple of Take That tributes who were able to sing a lot better than Robbie Williams and Gary Barlow," says Dean. Clark points out that Graham Sampson of the Smyths, a

→

▼ **Beat repeat**
Nadine l'Amour offers young fans a live take on Amy Winehouse
FABIO DE PAOLA

Smiths tribute band, can probably hold a note better than Morrissey.

Such skill and dedication in mirroring others can take an emotional toll. “Four or five years in, I had a bit of a breakdown,” says Budd. “I couldn’t keep up with being one person in my private life then going into Robbie mode and having to switch it off again. It was like a split personality.” But Budd has found a way around it, performing a different set every night, merging deep cuts with hits and being less gung ho about inhabiting Williams. “As I’ve matured, I go on stage as Dan and I sing the songs in his style and manner.”

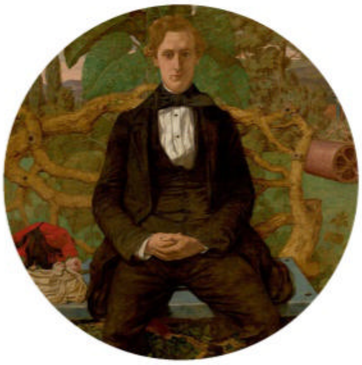
L’Amour says that while some people – such as Replika’s Prince-James Brown combo – moonlight in numerous tribute acts, she could only ever do Winehouse because of the significance of the material. “This is more than sticking on eyeliner and backcombing the beehive,” she says. “It’s a feeling. That gut-wrenching first love that kicks you in the stomach, having your heart broken beyond repair – but then being able to pour that out to the audience and feeling that love come back. It’s way more than a tribute for me.”

Tribute acts also have a domino effect on other areas in the industry. “It creates employment,” Clark says. “It drives paying musicians, designers, promoters, venues.” He points to the Smyths having a four-night run coming up at his venue. “What original bands at this [grassroots] level can do four nights and sell them out?” he asks. “Very few. Those four shows allow us to take the risk on booking something else.”

What is clear at Replika festival is that while, for many, these bands are vehicles for pure nostalgia, comfort and familiarity, they are also a first gateway to music. It is genuinely endearing watching battle jacket-clad children navigating their first mosh pit and working out the rhythms and etiquette as a fake Limp Bizkit turns a sizeable tent into an explosion of bouncing bodies. And it is a dream come true for the band members too, who seem blown away by the response.

DANIEL DYLAN WRAY IS A MUSIC AND CULTURE WRITER

▼ **Fresh take** Dan Budd is in demand as a Robbie Williams tribute act



ART AND DESIGN

Richard Dadd: Beyond Bedlam

Royal Academy, London

★★★★☆

The young man in the garden must be one of Richard Dadd’s fellow patients in the psychiatric hospital, you think. Yet the subject of Dadd’s 1853 Portrait of a Young Man is probably the superintendent.

Dadd murdered his father, whom he thought was the devil, then tried to kill a stranger while fleeing to Paris. He was quickly caught and would spend the rest of his life in Bedlam and Broadmoor. But how much does his mental illness explain his arresting, bizarre, sometimes unforgettable images?

The Royal Academy’s smallish Dadd survey urges us to see him as more than just a “mad” artist. Although he spent more than 40 years in psychiatric hospitals, it was where he painted his masterpiece The Fairy Feller’s Master-Stroke, that monstrously magnified corner of an English country garden.

You can’t escape the tragedy of a gifted artist who spent so much of his life locked up. But Dadd can’t be turned, as art historians long to, into a mainstream artist who just happened to be in institutions. Shine on, you crazy Victorian. *Jonathan Jones*

To 25 October

STAGE

Here Comes J Edgar!

King’s Head theatre, London

★★★★☆

This queering of FBI history does not seem like the stuff of fringe theatre. Created by US comedy royalty – Harry Shearer, a Simpsons cast member, pens the book and lyrics with Tom Leopold of Cheers and Seinfeld writing fame – and the music is by Peter Matz, known for his work with Barbra Streisand. Mad Men actor Bryan Batt plays the lead. It is even more curious that, as a very American story about the life and times of the first director of the bureau, it premieres in Britain.

The production deals with the question of whether Hoover was gay. It answers with a resounding “of course”, showing his longtime friend Clyde Tolson (Hugo Bolton, fabulous) to be his closeted lover.

Hoover, on his deathbed, is taken through his own Christmas Carol style reckoning, seeing his life re-enacted as a Broadway musical. His child self (Jess Pratley) is the ghost of the past. Hoover goes from precocious schoolboy who knows how to blackmail his headteacher to doing the same with four presidents.

Exuberantly directed by Josh Seymour, the show has bags of irony, campiness and satire as Hoover becomes the anti-hero of his life. The comedy has a Mel Brooks zing to it. But there is anguish that feels real and human, particularly in the love between Hoover and Tolson. Repressed desire also comes in the form of Hoover’s secretary Helen (Laura Medforth).

Sometimes it feels too big for the venue. But this is a ridiculously fun ride of a musical. You can see its West End ambitions, and with a bit of brushing up it deserves to be there. *Arifa Akbar*

To 16 August

Podcast of the week *Buried: Dead Rabbit*

Mangled pheasants, mutilated foxes, weeping kids: the third series of the award-winning show about environmental crime opens with a huge pile of murdered animals outside a primary school. The investigation leads to revelations about illegal bloodsports and rural organised crime. An essential listen. *Alexi Duggins*

Book marks

LA’s iconic library turns 100

Egyptian sphinxes and Greek stars welcomed thousands of visitors to celebrate the centenary of a remarkable building and the books within its walls

By *James Bartlett* LOS ANGELES

π=3.1415926535 8979323846 2643383279 50288419
6939937510 5820974944 5923078164 062862089

▼ **Novel exterior** The Los Angeles central library contains nearly 3m books
DAMIAN DOVARGANES/AP

The central library in downtown Los Angeles which turned 100 this month has been the backdrop to the epic street battle between Pacino, De Niro et al in Heat, and was where the original Ghostbusters came across their first ghost, a friendly older lady librarian who was anything but. Television shows such as Moonlighting, Murder, She Wrote and LA Law filmed there too, when characters were researching or investigating a case.

But the library has also been touched by the darker side of LA life. The “Night Stalker” serial killer Richard Ramirez came here in 1985 and asked for books on astrology and torture. Then there was the still-officially unsolved 1986 arson, which destroyed 400,000 volumes and shut the library for seven years.

“People think that libraries are quiet, but they really aren’t. They rumble with voices and footsteps and a whole orchestral range of book-related noises,” wrote Susan Orlean in her 2018 bestseller, The Library Book.

That was certainly true this month, when the author was one of the estimated 12,000 people who swelled through the corridors, halls, courtyards, rotunda, reading rooms and sculpture garden in celebration of its 100th anniversary. The art deco-era library, according to L is for Librarian: The ABCs of Los Angeles Central Library, houses nearly 3m books and 140km of shelves. Its most dazzling feature is the central rotunda – cathedral-like and lined with Dean Cornwell’s romanticised murals of California history. Visitors’ eyes are drawn up to the zodiac chandelier with its stained-glass globe and zodiac signs.

“It remains one of the city’s great civic spaces, a place that’s used, loved and valued every single day,” says Stephen Gee, the author of Los Angeles Central Library: A History of Its Art and Architecture. “It’s one of the few places in modern Los Angeles where everyone is welcome, regardless of their background or circumstances. It doesn’t ask who you are or what you earn.”

After outgrowing several smaller downtown locations, the municipal dream of a monumental downtown library was financed through a $2.5m municipal bond measure approved in 1921. Designed by the architect Bertram Goodhue, the central library officially opened its doors in 1926.

“Goodhue promised a library that was ‘Spanish in style – at least in spirit’,” noted Gee in his book, “but what he ultimately created was something far more original: a remarkable fusion of Spanish, Egyptian, Byzantine and Islamic influences.”

That fusion is apparent whether you approach the library from Hope Street, which was the original, mural-lined tunnel entrance, or through the sculpture and fountain-spotted Maguire Gardens. Towering over the main entrance are Hesper and Phosphor, the ancient Greek morning and evening stars; Hesper holds a scroll with the names of Moses, Buddha and Muhammad.

Most noticeable to the first-time visitor is the coloured mosaic pyramid on the roof, which features a sunburst and is topped by a handheld torch symbolising the light of learning. The Egyptian theme is also seen in two black-gold sphinxes, which rest at the top of a staircase on either side of a female statue representing civilisation.

One of the longest lines at the centennial festival was for a vintage injection-mould vending machine, which produced small replica wax models of those sphinxes. Christina Rice, the senior librarian of the library’s vast photo collection and a Central 100 co-chair, christened the whirring machine “Mold-A-Central”, and obtaining one had been on her wishlist for years.

“About a dozen years ago, we received an inquiry in the photo collection from a patron looking for images of these machines,” Rice says.

It unleashed a flood of childhood memories for Rice, who recalled getting animal models at the LA zoo. After finally tracking down one of the machines, she had it installed for the Central 100 event. “It will be a permanent fixture and we’ll be changing out the moulds periodically,” she says.

Rice explains that the library is as relevant as ever, despite those who might declare libraries “obsolete”. She mentions how the central library provides services for job hunters and those seeking a path to citizenship or looking to learn a new language. “We have a programme for adults to earn their high school diploma, loads of resources to get teens prepared for college and literacy assistance for patrons of all ages.”

On the science, technology and patents floor is the Octavia lab, which offers 3D printing, digitisers, converters, vinyl cutters, large-format printers – and sewing and embroidery machines. The facility is named after a former frequent patron, the late Octavia Butler, the renowned science fiction author who said: “Public libraries … are the open universities of America.”

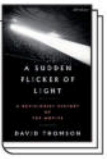
JAMES BARTLETT IS A JOURNALIST AND AUTHOR

NON-FICTION

Altered images

From the golden age to harder times today - a rapturous rewriting of the story of cinema

By *Peter Bradshaw*



Book of the week
A Sudden Flicker of Light
By David Thomson

Film critic, historian and author of more than 40 books, David Thomson is back with another three-hour free jazz solo on the subject of the movies, though it's a performance delivered with the magnificent elan of a 1940s big band leader. He's as brilliant, eccentric, exasperating and absorbing as ever.

By "the movies", incidentally, he means Hollywood, with a side order of established European and east Asian arthouse: he takes us from the cine-prehistory of photographer Eadweard Muybridge to Fritz Lang's Metropolis, DW Griffith's Birth of a Nation with its sinister Ku Klux Klan hero-worship, Chaplin, Stroheim, Hitchcock, Capra, Renoir, Bogart, Marilyn Monroe in The Seven-Year Itch, Monroe Stahr in The Last Tycoon, Scorsese's Goodfellas, David Lynch's Mulholland Drive ("Is it drive or dream?"), Kirk Douglas and his alleged rape of Natalie Wood, Barbara Loden's Wanda, Sean Baker's Anora, Tracey Emin's Why I Never Became a Dancer and much more. He subtitles his book a "revisionist" history.

Revisionist? Well, it certainly takes us to wintry and sombre ponderings on the movies' (perennial) tendency to coarsen and to cheapen, to enforce cultural mob-rule. He cites King Vidor's 1928 film The Crowd, starring James Murray, a former extra plucked from the ranks and groomed for glory but whose awful destiny was to descend into alcoholism and homelessness - back into the crowd. He emphasises movies' amazing populist-democratic power and reach, their power embodied by the fact that, unlike in the theatre or concert hall, a film's action could not be stopped or affected by the crowd in front of it. Like a theologian dragged by doubts to the foot of the cross, Thomson wonders if the movies will always lack literature's way of allowing us to enlarge our imaginations, as opposed to forcing a submission to the screen.

He descants on the triumph of Stephen Graham's Netflix drama Adolescence and uses it to suggest that the big-screen theatrical experience may indeed be on the way out, because "the image on our home screens is brighter and more transporting. If you are inclined to dispute that, look very closely." Well, I have looked closely and I do dispute it. All the same, Thomson's contrarian, non-handwringing opinion on the subject is refreshing.

The book's body language is non-revisionist: it's a straightforwardly rapturous, rhapsodic celebration of the extraordinary adventure of cinema with an old-fashioned feel. The author is a great believer in the importance of profits and grosses, though he's also a great respecter of the importance of Sight and Sound magazine's decennial Greatest Film of All Time poll.

The point is that Thomson always wants to recount the whole story. That is his revisionism: always to take on the whole thing. He contrasts the darker moods of the American New Wave with the contemporary sunlit positivity of Steven Spielberg, who, he says, is "the most decisive figure in the history of film, a guy who came upon an art experimenting with difficulty or doubt and talked it in off the ledge".

Thomson takes his title from a moment in Henry James's 1881 novel The Portrait of a Lady: heroine Isabel Archer has married Gilbert Osmond and one day comes home to find their mutual friend Madame Merle and Osmond in an attitude of disconcerting intimacy and ease, he seated and she standing: "… the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light". Thomson enthuses about that moment, and capriciously adds: "I want to bring this scene to life, with maybe Meryl Streep as Madame Merle, and who would you like as Osmond?" (Thomson appears here to disregard the excellent film version with John Malkovich as Osmond and Barbara Hershey as Madame Merle, directed by Jane Campion and starring Nicole Kidman, whose superfan biography Thomson has written. To be fair, Campion's film doesn't actually include that flickering moment.)

So how about now? Are the movies beginning to flicker out into darkness? Well, the gloomy-elegaic insistence on the end of cinema is a tiresome kind of cinephile affectation that's been around for decades, usually from writers who are in fact mourning the passing of their own movie-filled youth and middle age. Thomson thankfully does not indulge it.

It could be that this book is not a conventional critical work at all; it is rather quasi-fictional, like an action painting made from melted celluloid in which Thomson is the creator-hero, splashing around on the canvas in his multicoloured liquid element. Or simply an epic novel: he alludes to EL Doctorow's 1975 book Ragtime, about immigration and the American dream in the early 20th century, that mixes real figures with imaginary ones. Here, Thomson is both the narrator and underdog, meeting with legends in the crowded streets of Los Angeles or New York, feeling their pain, sensing their euphoria, foretelling their downfall or triumph. I very much hope that this is not his last book. I can't imagine film criticism or films without him.

PETER BRADSHAW IS THE GUARDIAN'S FILM CRITIC

Audiobook of the week
The Midnight Train
By Matt Haig

The latest novel from Matt Haig begins with an octogenarian man, Wilbur Budd, dying from a heart attack. Wilbur finds himself standing on a train platform when a woman introduces herself as Agnes. She will, she says, be guiding him through his past, pausing at formative moments. "This is death," Agnes tells him. With shades of Dickens's A Christmas Carol, The Midnight Train is a cosy feelgood tale. The narrator is the Happy Valley actor James Norton, who brings a rare softness and gentle longing to his performance.
Fiona Sturges

FICTION

Freewheeling finale

The grit of 80s New York provides a fitting location to conclude the Harlem Trilogy

By *Xan Brooks*

COLSON WHITEHEAD
COOL MACHINE

Cool Machine
By Colson Whitehead

In the summer of 1977 a bolt of lightning struck a substation, knocking out power across New York City. Two nights of darkness sparked a wave of looting as Harlem and Bronx teenagers swiped high-end items from the downtown stores. They took speaker systems and turntables to experiment with at home. They taught themselves how to scratch and mix, and sang self-styled scat lyrics into stolen microphones. Hip-hop, according to urban legend, was the child of a lightning strike and a robbing spree.

It's art from crime, thinks Ray Carney, the hardscrabble hero of Colson Whitehead's rollicking Cool Machine, the final part of his Harlem Trilogy. For years Carney has led the sort of intrepid double life that would make Spider-Man proud, supplementing his furniture business on 125th Street with a lucrative sideline as an underworld fence. In his stealthy, dogged fashion, he helps facilitate a process he describes as "the churn": the movement of stolen goods through New York. The churn fuels the economy and helps refresh the culture. It's the city's equivalent of an endocrine system.

Skipping through three interlinked tales from 1981 to 1986, Cool Machine uncovers the seeds of 21st-century cultural appropriation in the trade of African artefacts and sports memorabilia. A decade ago, Carney's director friend Zippo was shooting blaxploitation pictures uptown. Now he's hanging with the arthouse crowd, working on a redubbed version of Hitchcock's 1963 classic in which the N-word is substituted for every mention of birds.

Cool Machine covers the New York of Whitehead's youth, a scene he experienced first-hand, which only adds to the air of freewheeling fun. Whitehead maps the streets, labels the landmarks and dips in at intervals with handy background information. He takes a dark and dangerous corner of history and makes it feel illuminated, magnified, even borderline family-friendly. The plot plays like pop-art Marxist noir, jam-packed with cultural references and thrumming with class and racial tensions.

It's the churn, paradoxically, that keeps the tale honest. It adds grit and grandeur to the sugar hit of nostalgia. The churn, Carney decides, applies to more than the flow of stolen goods. It is the great whip and roil of the city; the successive waves of immigrants washing through the neighbourhoods. Carney is now in his 50s and has one eye on the exit door. He's toiling to maintain his position, fighting the currents of a city that is as ageless and elemental as the Mississippi River. New York, he comes to realise, doesn't care whether he lives or dies. It's all-seeing and indifferent and just keeps rolling along.

XAN BROOKS IS A WRITER AND BROADCASTER

MEMOIR

Roots of radicalism

Thoughtful, engaging insight into what leads a 60-year-old woman to turn to the far right

By *Fiona Sturges*

These Wild English
By Nicola Wilding

THESE WILD ENGLISH

When Sandra Forsyth began marching in support of the English Defence League, her daughter Nicola Wilding hoped it was a phase. The Cumbria-bred, Dover-dwelling Sandra was about to turn 60 and had been dealing with a lot of stress. Her son been sentenced to two years in prison for armed robbery, and she was working at a home for adults with complex needs. She liked the job, but it could be gruelling – especially when clients hurled furniture at her.

Then, in May 2013, came the death of Lee Rigby, a drummer with the Second Battalion of the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers who was murdered by Islamist terrorists. Sandra didn't know Rigby, Wilding notes, but his death nonetheless brought her pent-up rage to the surface. She began watching videos on Facebook by a man named Tommy Robinson, who wanted to know why the country's brave soldiers were being murdered. By September of that year, she was protesting on the streets of London.

These Wild English is a heartfelt and evocative memoir of Wilding's mother Sandra who, up until her death in 2024, endured poverty, upheaval and abusive partners, as well as a heart condition leading to two rounds of surgery.

Wilding is a TV documentary maker specialising in poverty and rural working-class communities, though here she is no dispassionate observer. She also has an eye on the bigger picture, noting how wider events and the social and economic decisions taken in Westminster can affect the lives of vulnerable individuals and communities.

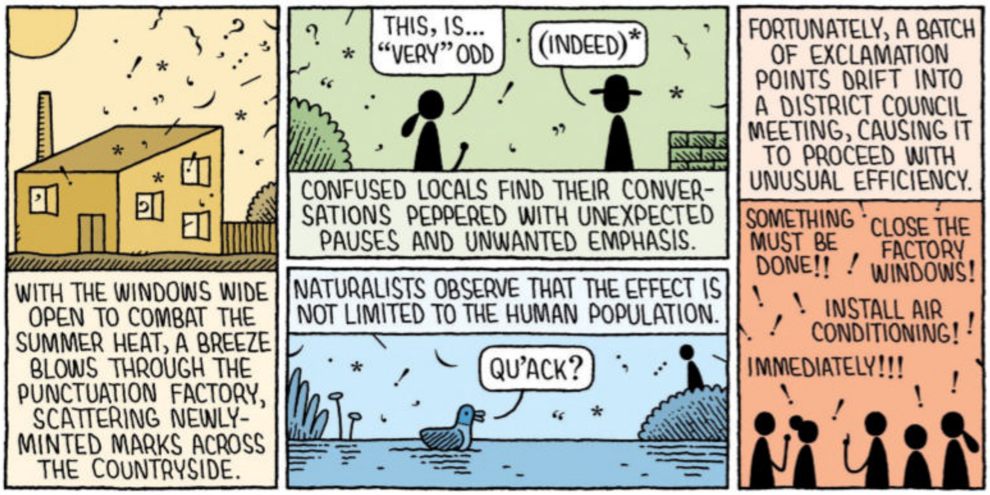
Writing in thoughtful and elegantly understated prose, she digs into the roots of Sandra's dissatisfaction, telling a story that spans three generations, starting out with her early life in the 1960s on her father's farm in Eden Valley, Cumbria, where she was tasked with looking after her siblings during the recurring periods when her own mother did a runner.

These Wild English blends the personal and political to illustrate the ways families are shaped by circumstance and inherited trauma, and can be buffeted by forces beyond their control. At its heart is Sandra, a protagonist for the ages who is wayward, charismatic, fierce, caring and – wisely or not – always up for a fight.

FIONA STURGES IS AN ARTS WRITER

The rise of the 'hot literati'
How reading became sexy

TOM GAULD


WITH THE WINDOWS WIDE OPEN TO COMBAT THE SUMMER HEAT, A BREEZE BLOWS THROUGH THE PUNCTUATION FACTORY, SCATTERING NEWLY-MINTED MARKS ACROSS THE COUNTRYSIDE.
THIS, IS... "VERY" ODD
(INDEED)*
CONFUSED LOCALS FIND THEIR CONVERSATIONS PEPPERED WITH UNEXPECTED PAUSES AND UNWANTED EMPHASIS.
NATURALISTS OBSERVE THAT THE EFFECT IS NOT LIMITED TO THE HUMAN POPULATION.
QU'ACK?
FORTUNATELY, A BATCH OF EXCLAMATION POINTS DRIFT INTO A DISTRICT COUNCIL MEETING, CAUSING IT TO PROCEED WITH UNUSUAL EFFICIENCY.
SOMETHING MUST BE DONE!!
CLOSE THE FACTORY WINDOWS!
INSTALL AIR CONDITIONING!
IMMEDIATELY!!!

MODERN LIFE
Tim Dowling

The dog's sheep awareness training goes well. Too well

It's another scorching day, maybe the ninth or tenth in a row. Work is impossible – I spend the afternoon wandering the house in search of the coolest place to stand. I'm at the foot of the stairs when my wife rings.

"This is ridiculous," she says. "I'm standing still."

"Me too," I say. "Where are you?"

"On the M25," she says.

"Where have you been?" I say.

"Sheep awareness training," she says.

"Oh yeah," I say. "How was it?"

"Brilliant," she says. "She's absolutely traumatised. I'll tell you about it, if we ever get home."

Our old dog, unfailingly obedient and chicken-hearted, never troubled sheep. At two years old the new dog has had almost no direct experience of livestock, but has never met an animal it did not want to chase: foxes, squirrels, Canada geese.

When my wife heard about a farmer in Kent who would cure your dog of any interest in sheep, she made an appointment.

"Is this because of the thing that happened in the Archers?" I'd said.

"No," she'd said. "I signed up before all that."

My wife arrives home 90 minutes later, trailing a hint of car air conditioning. The dog comes into the kitchen behind her and immediately flattens itself against the cool floorboards.

"She's got post traumatic sheep disorder," my wife says.

"What was it like?" I say.

"So he's a real farmer," she says. "In farmer's clothes."

"OK," I say.

"And you start out in a tiny pen, with two sheep and the dog on a short lead," she says. "Predictably, the dog is going nuts."

"Predictably," I say.

"Barking, straining, trying to get at the sheep. And the farmer has this plastic bottle full of pebbles, which he shakes. And shouts at the same time. The shouting is important."

"Of course," I say.

"Anyway, within five minutes she's just sitting there, trying not to make eye contact with the sheep."

"Then what?" I say.

"Then you move to a bigger pen, with more sheep, and you do it again. By this point she won't leave my side. And he's still shaking the bottle whenever she even starts to look at the sheep. She's hating every minute of it."

"And that's it?" I say.

"Oh no," my wife says. "After that we graduate to an actual field full of sheep, with two collies driving the entire flock right at us, over and over. By now she's freaking out and trying to pretend there are no sheep."

"Huh," I say.

"I promise you, the whole thing took half an hour."

"How much?" I say.

"Forty pounds," she says.

The place where we happen to be spending the following weekend is surrounded by fields. As soon as we get out of the car we can hear distant bleating from both sides of the valley. The dog gets back in the car.

"Our dog has a sheep phobia," I say. "We have to go back to London."

"We can't," my wife says. "I need to do reinforcement training. First, I need to fill this bottle with pebbles."

Up the hill we come to a gate. On the other side a flock of black sheep is gathered under a tree. My wife opens the gate and the dog, now on a long lead, reluctantly steps through.

The sheep seem larger than I expected, and only when we're very close do they give way. The dog is giving them a wide berth.

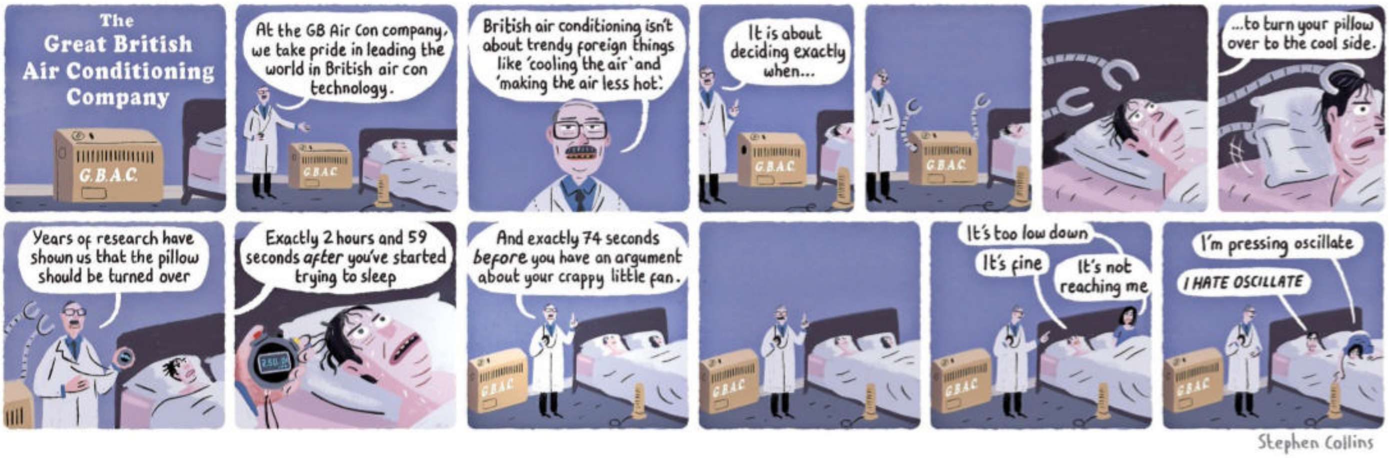
"Wow," I say. "It really works."

One lone sheep has gone downhill instead, separating itself from the rest. The dog does not see it through the tall grass as she walks towards it. No more than 10 metres separate the two animals when the dog finally senses movement. For a moment the sheep and the dog regard one another with wary respect.

"Hyah!" my wife screams, slamming down her bottle of pebbles. The dog jumps in terror, and so do I.

> ***"Our dog now has a sheep phobia. We will have to go back to London***

STEPHEN COLLINS


The Great British Air Conditioning Company
G.B.A.C.
At the GB Air Con company, we take pride in leading the world in British air con technology.
British air conditioning isn't about trendy foreign things like 'cooling the air' and 'making the air less hot'.
It is about deciding exactly when...
...to turn your pillow over to the cool side.
Years of research have shown us that the pillow should be turned over
Exactly 2 hours and 59 seconds *after* you've started trying to sleep
And exactly 74 seconds *before* you have an argument about your crappy little fan.
It's too low down
It's fine
It's not reaching me
I'm pressing oscillate
I HATE OSCILLATE
Stephen Collins

KITCHEN AIDE

By *Anna Berrill*

The wrong flour, cold dough or egg size? There's a science to fresh pasta

When making fresh pasta, why does the dough sometimes tear when rolling, and other times not?
Thomas, by email

"I'm sorry to hear your pasta is rippy," sympathises Jacob Kenedy, chef-patron of Bocca di Lupo in London, who is teaming up with fellow chef Merlin Labron-Johnson to celebrate the Italian midsummer holiday *ferragosto* with two feasts in Somerset next month. Assuming Thomas is rolling an egg pasta dough in a pasta machine, there are a number of possible explanations. First, Kenedy says, he might be using the wrong type of flour ("use 00 flour"), the dough might be too cold ("use it at room temperature") or too dry ("it should be supple, like Play-Doh"). Naz Hassan, head chef of Ornella and Lupa, both in London, adds that the latter might be down to the size of the egg(s) Thomas is using: "One egg to 100g of 00 flour is the basic pasta dough recipe, but that will vary depending on the size of your egg," he says. For people who prefer to use just the yolk, Hassan suggests thinking about adding the egg white, too: "It has the structure that allows pasta to have the stretchiness it deserves."

But, a dough that is too wet might also spell trouble, Kenedy says: "I like my pasta dough wet enough to roll by hand, which means, if I roll it in a machine, it sticks slightly to the roller and may rip." The fix? Laminate the dough thoroughly and perhaps use "the finest dusting" of flour until the dough passes smoothly through the pasta machine. "Then make sure to roll that flour in, so the outside of the pasta isn't dusty," Kenedy adds.

As in life, time out is also important. "You need to rest the dough to allow the gluten structure to relax and bind together," says Hassan, who does this overnight, while Kenedy prefers to rest his dough, covered and at room temperature, for half an hour to an hour after kneading. In fact, Kenedy reckons that poor gluten development is the most likely suspect of Thomas's pasta plight: "Laminate the pasta many, many times at the thickest setting," he says. "Roll, fold in half, roll again, fold in three, roll again - at least 12 times - until the pasta is extremely silky-smooth, before rolling it any thinner."

The rolling is also where Thomas really needs to practise the art of patience. Hassan says: "If you try to force the dough through the machine or skip one of the steps, that will create ridges on the sides of the dough." And that, in turn, can cause those rips. "It's hard to know which of these reasons it might be without standing next to Thomas in the kitchen," Hassan adds.

ANNA BERRILL IS A FOOD WRITER

Got a culinary dilemma?
Email feast@theguardian.com

BLOODSTONE/ISTOCK/GETTY

THE WEEKLY RECIPE

By *Richard Makin*

№ 376

Pho now or pho later

Prep	10 min
Cook	30 min
Serves	2

● VEGAN
● DAIRY FREE

Once made, the broth can sit in the fridge for up to a week, ready to be reheated and poured over noodles and vegetables at a moment's notice. And it'll taste even better with time!

Ingredients
1 tsp vegetable oil
200g extra-firm tofu, drained and cubed
2 shallots, peeled and roughly chopped
2 garlic cloves, peeled and roughly crushed with the flat of a knife
2½cm piece fresh ginger, roughly sliced
2 star anise
4 cloves
2 tsp coriander seeds
2 green cardamom pods
1 cinnamon stick
½ tsp chilli flakes
½ tsp fennel seeds
1½ litres vegetable stock
150g long-stem broccoli, trimmed
170g flat rice noodles
1 tbsp soy sauce
1 tbsp brown sugar
1 tsp fine sea salt
2 tbsp white rice vinegar

To serve
1 shallot, peeled and finely chopped
1 red chilli, stalk, pith and seeds removed, flesh finely chopped
1 small carrot, peeled and julienned or grated
Fresh coriander, mint and basil
2 lime wedges

Method
Put the vegetable oil in a large saucepan on a medium heat, then fry the tofu for five minutes, turning often, until browned all over. Lift it out of the pan, stir the shallots, garlic, ginger and spices into the hot oil left in the pan and cook, stirring, for two minutes, until fragrant. Pour in the stock, bring to a boil over a medium heat, then leave to bubble for 10 minutes.

Put the broccoli in a steamer basket (or sieve) and place it over the top of the simmering pot. Turn down the heat to a simmer, cover the pan with a lid and steam the broccoli for five minutes, until tender. Take out the broccoli and set aside.

Strain the stock to remove the spices and aromatics, then return the clear broth to the pan and put it on a medium heat. Add the rice noodles and cook for five minutes, or until tender.

Divide the noodles between two deep bowls, and top them both with half the steamed broccoli and fried tofu. Stir the soy sauce, brown sugar, sea salt and rice vinegar into the hot broth, then take it off the heat.

If serving straight away, pour the broth over the noodles, broccoli and tofu in each bowl; if serving later, cool the broth to room temperature, then transfer to an airtight container. Cover the noodle bowls (or transfer to a heat-proof jar) and keep in the fridge for up to a week.

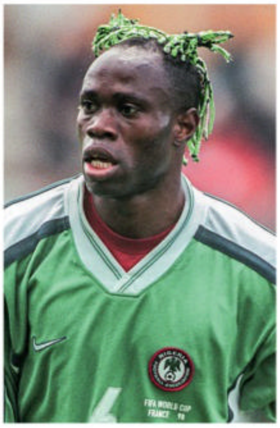
When ready to serve, bring the broth back to a boil, then pour it over the noodles. Garnish with chopped shallot, red chilli, julienned carrot, fresh herbs and a lime wedge.

Notes and Queries
The long-running series that invites readers to send in questions and answers on anything and everything

QUIZ

Thomas Eaton

1 Whose The Dream (The Bed) is the most expensive painting by a woman?
2 Which capital city is served by Carthage airport?
3 Which famous feuding families appear in Canto VI of Dante's Purgatory?
4 Which composer was bandmaster at the Worcester County and City Lunatic Asylum?
5 At what point in a planet's orbit is it closest to the sun?
6 Liverpool FC were 2023 league champions in which country?



▲ What does Taribo West have in common with Andrea Jaeger, Philip Mulryne and David Sheppard?

SPORTSPHOTO

7 Lock & Co is the world's oldest shop selling what?
8 What insulting messages were sent by Victorians on 14 February?

What links:
9 Finding Nemo; Little Shop of Horrors; Marathon Man; The Hangover?
10 Andrea Jaeger; Philip Mulryne; David Sheppard; Taribo West?
11 Billington and Mayman; Block and Quayle; Clemens and August?
12 Alloy; carbon; stainless; tool?
13 Maglia Rosa; Maillot Jaune; La Roja?
14 Plutarch; Giorgio Vasari; John Aubrey; Leslie Stephen; Lytton Strachey?

PUZZLES

Chris Maslanka

1 Wordpool
Find the correct definition
AREOGRAPHY
a) the laws of land division
b) war studies
c) evolution of soils
d) description of the surface of Mars

2 Dropouts
Identify the word in which each asterisk marks a missing letter:
*A*I*R*S**

3 Jumblies
Rearrange *ARCHAISM* to make another word.

4 Same Difference
Identify the words that differ only in their first letter:
*E***** (dominion)*
*U***** (arbiter)*

© CMM2026

Answers
Quiz: 1 Frida Kahlo ($54.7m at auction in 2025). **2** Tunis. **3** Montecchi and Cappelletti (Montague and Capulet). **4** Edward Elgar. **5** Perihelion. **6** Uruguay. **7** Hats. **8** Vinegar Valentines. **9** Films featuring dentists. **10** Sportspeople who went into religious life: tennis to nun; football to priest; cricket to Anglican bishop; football to pastor. **11** Surnames/first names in retailers' names: B&M; B&Q; C&A. **12** Categories of steel. **13** Leaders' jerseys of major cycling tours: Giro d'Italia; Tour de France; Vuelta a España. **14** Wrote (or edited) works of collective biography: Parallel Lives; Lives of the Artists; Brief Lives; Dictionary of National Biography; Eminent Victorians.
Puzzles: 1 d). **2** AVIARIST, APIARIST. **3** CHARISMA. **4** EMPIRE, UMPIRE.

CHESS

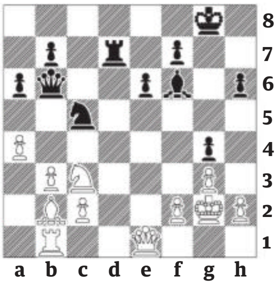
Leonard Barden

England's 11-year-old talent Bodhana Sivanandan scored her best individual result this month, when the Harrow schoolgirl defeated France's 2628-rated grandmaster Marc'Andria Maurizzi, 19, in the opening round of the Dole Trophy in Aix-en-Provence. Maurizzi was world under-20 junior champion in 2023 and is the current French champion.

Sivanandan had beaten two GMs previously, but neither was as eminent as Maurizzi, and her result is a new world age record for a girl to defeat a grandmaster rated over 2600. The previous record holder was the all-time women's No 1, Judit Polgár, who defeated GM Lajos Portisch, a former world title candidate, in the 1988 Hungarian Championship when she was aged 12 years and two months.

Sivanandan also became the fifth youngest pre-teen to defeat a 2600+ rated GM, but she could not maintain her stellar form into round two, losing to the Israeli international master Benny Aizenberg. In the third round, however, she drew with GM Maxim Rodshtein, the Israel No 2.

4034 Sivanandan v Marc'Andria Maurizzi, Dole Open, Aix-en-Provence 2026. The 2628-rated French grandmaster took 18 seconds for his last move ...Qb4-b6. What did he overlook?



4034 1 b4!! played after six minutes. Black's c5 knight has no escape, while **1**...Bxc3? loses to **2** Qxc3 with mate threats at g7 and h8. Black gave up his queen by **1**...Qxb4 **2** Nd5! Qxb2 **3** Rxb2, but White won on material 11 moves later, and so broke Judit Polgar's record.

COUNTRY DIARY

EYAM MOOR

Derbyshire, England, UK

High on Eyam Moor, there was no shortage of things to look at. Meadow vetch and lady's bedstraw had turned the trackside a vibrant yellow. The moor itself glittered white with heath bedstraw, over which small heath butterflies fluttered restlessly. The rich and ceaseless accompaniment to this was a skylark overhead, and as I approached the farmhouse and the stand of sycamores beyond, the saccharine flourish of goldfinches.

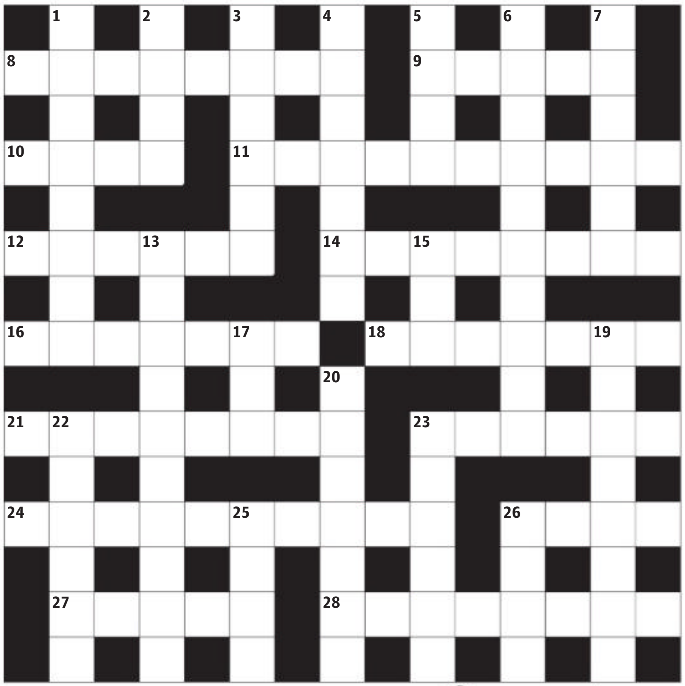
All that was missing was the creature I'd come to see. It had recently departed. Near the farm, the long grasses had been flattened into a rough circle, or "form", where a leveret had spent its early weeks. Its human neighbours had alerted me, but I had waited too long to visit, and now, like a ghost, the hare had vanished. Never mind.

There are only three lagomorphs in Britain: the native mountain hare, which has a small colony in the Peak District, and two more recent arrivals, the brown hare and the rabbit. Hares and rabbits have profoundly different reproduction strategies. Rabbit kits arrive naked and blind, needing the security of a burrow to reach maturity. Hares produce fewer offspring, but they are born ready for this perilous world, furred and eyes open.

Subterfuge is the hare's game – or, more accurately, hiding in plain sight. The mother visits only at dusk to suckle her young; otherwise the youngster hunkers down on its own, lest the mother's presence attract the attention of a passing fox or stoat. It will even move away from its form to defecate, so that the odour doesn't reveal its presence.

A light touch is the hare's trick. Down the track, I saw two black-tipped ears above some thistles, and then they were gone. *Ed Douglas*

ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER



* All solutions published next week

The Weekly cryptic

No 30,064

By *Brummie*

Across

8 Nick and Henry Bird (4-4)
9 Pink cattle pen? Not right! (5)
10 Articulated fruit is not fair (4)
11 Left and right wings of party turn back, collapsing into ruin (10)
12 Hair loss ultimately comes before anxiety (6)
14 Are fired (sacked), being thin (8)
16 Herald's power decline (7)
18 Hearing of pub expedition, neighbours start off (7)
21 Panels damaged - try pitch (8)
23 Dialect reveals smooth love lives (6)
24 Kid's rental bike fixed (5-5)
26 Bottle essential parts (4)
27 Crew strive to get leader replaced (5)
28 Shrewd US composer making records (8)

Down

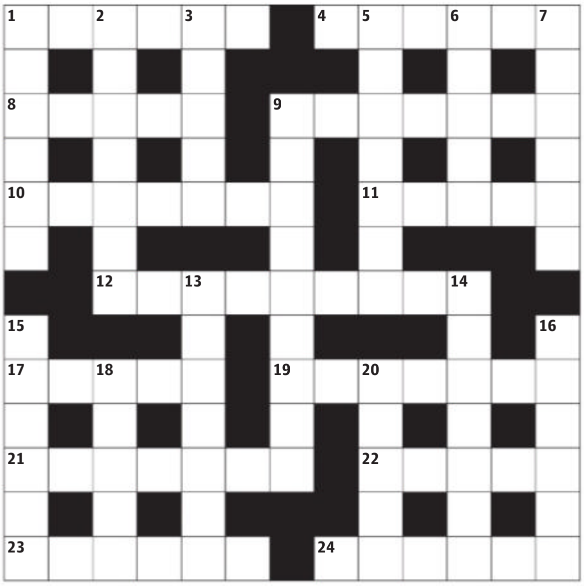
1 Tough comedian without name (8)
2 Just a second to remove top? Doubtful (4)
3 A core island sun god (6)
4 Depend on getting in support for a music genre (7)
5 Wizard at foot of elder tree (4)
6 Fig, pear almost turn out to be the possible basis of fad diet (10)
7 Chestnut one replaced with ring for crop protection (6)
13 Drugs defence involving college that's associated with Houdini (10)
15/17 Stand for election (ironic) and get through all the booze (3,3)
19 Game of kiss and tell, perhaps, with time for Latin (8)
20 Poet's wife and enforcer (7)
22 Twin drying aid, lidless (6)
23 Devout, bawdy and buccaneering (6)
25 Ram's a laughing-stock (4)
26 Easy: massive return with little initially invested (4)

Solution No 30,058

	M		R		F				S		L		E	
F	I	R	E	A	R	M		L	O	U	I	S	X	V
	N		T		A				A		N		I	
V	I	S	A		N	O	C	O	N	T	E	S	T	
			I		C		O		D		A			
	M	E	L	E	E		L	I	S	T	L	E	S	S
	O		E				O		O				T	
L	I	A	R		A	P	R	E	S		W	R	A	P
	L				U		A				E		R	
R	E	N	D	E	R	E	D		L	E	T	A	T	
			E		E		A		A		S			
	E	N	L	I	V	E	N	E	D		U	N	D	O
	C		U		O				D		I		O	
C	H	A	G	R	I	N		C	E	S	T	M	O	I
	O		E		R				R		S		R	

Quick crossword

No 17,537



Across

1 Rum and lime juice cocktail (6)
4 Servant (6)
8 Old coin of eg Italy or the Netherlands (5)
9 Nonetheless (7)
10 Free lad (anag) (7)
11 Small record label (5)
12 Skilful writer (9)
17 Last Greek letter (5)
19 M25, eg (7)
21 Lover (7)
22 Cinema guide (5)
23 Assets (6)
24 Of gnashers (6)

Down

1 Fielding position (3-3)
2 Black and grey bird (7)
3 Teacher (5)
5 From a country on the tip of the Persian Gulf (7)
6 Graphic (5)
7 Full-length pitched delivery (6)
9 Good grief! (4,5)
13 Grantee (anag) (7)
14 Axe (7)
15 Light dessert (6)
16 Word ending in 's', usually (6)
18 Leap for joy (5)
20 Tuber (anag) (5)

Solution No 17,531

P	U	L	P		J	E	O	P	A	R	D	Y
A		E				N		E		O		O
R	O	A	R		T	R	A	N	Q	U	I	L
A		P		F		I		T		T		K
D	U	F	F	E	L	C	O	A	T			
I		R		V		H		T		V		A
G	R	O	V	E	L		H	E	L	I	U	M
M		G		R		V		U		R		E
			U	P	P	E	R	C	R	U	S	T
C		T		I		R		H		L		H
H	E	R	I	T	A	G	E		B	E	V	Y
I		O		C		E				N		S
C	U	T	S	H	O	R	T		S	T	E	T

Sudoku

Hard

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

6	3						9	8
	7		6		2		4	
5			3		8			1
		6		2		1		
	2		5		6		8	
		7		8		4		
7			1		5			2
	1		2		9		7	
2	6						1	9

Last week's solution

1	6	8	5	9	3	7	2	4
2	3	7	6	4	1	5	8	9
4	9	5	8	7	2	6	1	3
8	7	3	2	6	4	1	9	5
5	1	2	7	3	9	4	6	8
9	4	6	1	5	8	3	7	2
6	8	9	3	1	5	2	4	7
3	2	1	4	8	7	9	5	6
7	5	4	9	2	6	8	3	1

20% off

For page turners

How to survive the information crisis
By KATHARINE VINER 34
Weekly
med!
world's
vean
elves
rs?
The Guardian Weekly
PLUS ● Can Burnham turn Britain around? 22
● The war over Italy's private beaches
A week in the life of the world | Global edition
24 JULY 2026 | VOL 215 No.4 | £6.50 | €9.95
UP IN FLAMES
Are we ready for the age of global wildfires?
SPECIAL REPORT
The Guardian
A week in the life of the world | Global edition
10 JULY 2026 | VOL 215 No.2 | £6.50 | €9.95
America

Gift the Guardian Weekly

Know that page-turner in your life who would also enjoy the Guardian Weekly magazine? You can gift a Guardian Weekly subscription, with 20% off an annual subscription. They'll get the same magazine you know and love delivered to them every week, wherever they are in the world - so they can stay informed and inspired with our independent journalism.

Visit theguardian.com/gwgifting or scan the QR code

Package	Price per issue	Price per year
Retail price	~~£6.50~~	~~£331.50~~
Gift subscription offer	**£3.11**	**£158.40**

The Guardian Weekly

Offer is 20% off an annual gift subscription. Offer is not available for personal subscriptions. Guardian News and Media reserves the right to end this offer at any time. Offer details correct at time of printing. For terms and conditions, visit theguardian.com/weeklyterms.